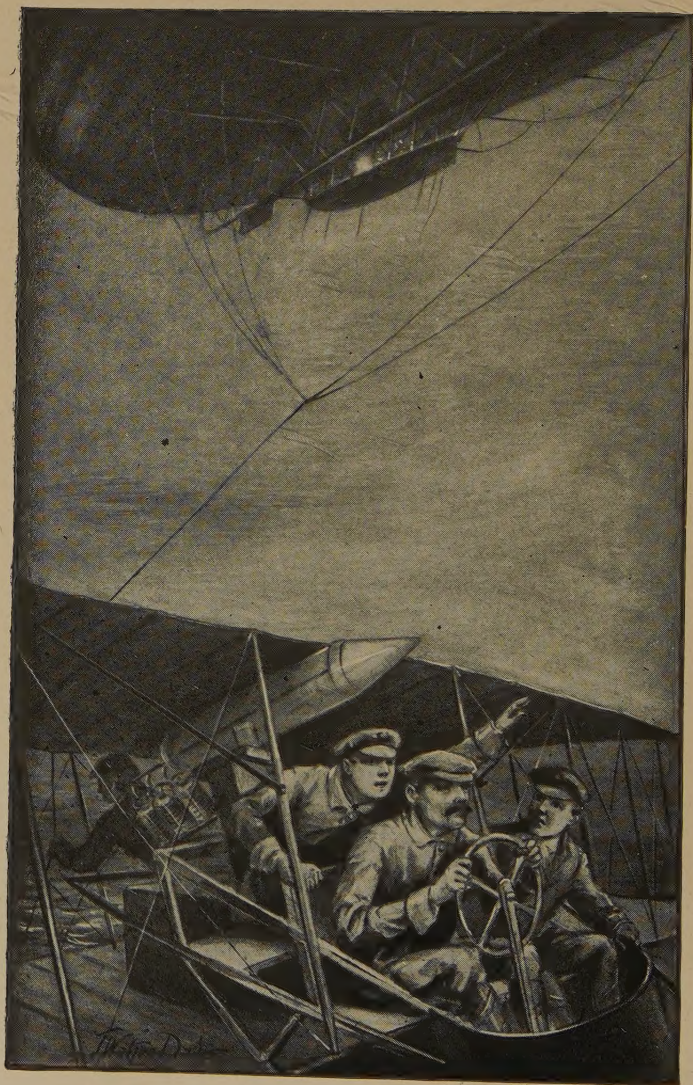


Our YOUNG AEROPLANE SCOUTS
In FRANCE and BELGIUM
By HORACE PORTER





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The Aeroplane Scouts In France and Belgium.

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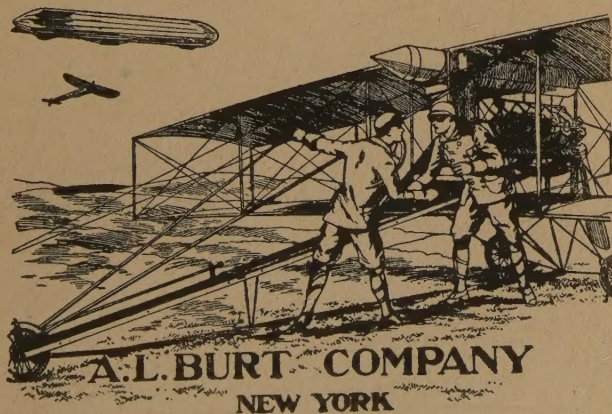
OR

Saving the Fortunes of the Trouvilles

By HORACE PORTER

AUTHOR OF

"Our Young Aeroplane Scouts In Germany." "Our Young
Aeroplane Scouts In Russia." "Our Young
Aeroplane Scouts In Turkey."



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AND BELGIUM

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CHAPTER I.

THRILLING VOYAGE IN A SEA-PLANE.

IT was a muggy night in Dover—not an unusual thing in Dover—but nevertheless the wind had an extra whip in it and was lashing the outside Channel into a state of wild waves. An acetylene flare revealed several muffled figures flitting here and there on the harbor brink. There was a glint from polished surface, a flash-like, downward rush of a long, tapering hull, and a splash in the dark waters below. A sea-plane had been deftly launched. Motors hummed, a wide wake streamed away to the rear of the wonder craft, which, suddenly, as if by magic drawn upward from the tide, joined the winds that sported aloft.

Captain Leonidas Johnson, noted as an airman in the four quarters of the globe, sat tight behind the rudder wheel, and back in the band-box engine room was Josiah Freeman, one time of Boston, U. S. A.

Two aboard were not of the regular crew. Be-

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hind the wind-screen were Billy Barry and Henri Trouville, our Aviator Boys, bound for the coast of France, and bound to get there.

Ever higher and higher, the intrepid navigators sailed into a clearing atmosphere, where the clouds were being gathered into a moonlight bath. The 120's were forcing a speed of something like a mile to the minute, and doing it at 2,000 feet above the sea level.

Through Dover Straits the swift trend of the great mechanical bird was toward the North Sea, the blurring high lights of Dover fading in the distance rearward and Calais showing a glimmer on the distant right.

Captain Johnson switched on the ghost light to get his bearings from the facing dials, and speaking to the shadowy figures in the observation seat indulged in a bit of humor by asking:

"You young daredevils, how does this strike you?"

An answering high note from Billy:

"You're doing bully, Captain, but mind your eye and don't knock a hole in Dunkirk by flying too low."

"Well, of all the nerve," chuckled the veteran wheelman, "'flying too low,' and the sky almost close enough to touch."

A pressure forward on the elevating lever shot the sea-plane downward, and the turn again to level

keel was made a scant five hundred feet above the choppy surface of the Channel.

"We'll take to boating again at Dunkirk," observed the captain, but the observation was heard only by himself, for now the wind and the waves and the motors and the straining of the aircraft combined to drown even a voice like the captain's.

There was destined to be no landing that night at Dunkirk. An offshore gale, not to be denied, suddenly swept the Channel with howling force. Rising, dipping, twisting, the sea-plane dashed on in uncertain course, and when at last it had outridden the storm Ostend was in sight—the Atlantic City of the Belgians.

The stanch aircraft, with engines silenced, rocked now upon the heaving tide. Its tanks were empty. Not a drop of petrol in them. Retreat was impossible, and in the broad light of the new day there was no place of concealment.

While four shivering shapes shifted cramped positions and gratefully welcomed the warming sun-rays, they were under survey of powerful field-glasses in the hands of a gray-garbed sentry.

CHAPTER II.

A LOOK BACKWARD.

AFTER following Billy and Henri in their perilous and thrilling night ride, it has occurred that they should have first been properly introduced and their mission in the great war zone duly explained. Only a few weeks preceding their first adventure, as described in the initial chapter, they were giving flying exhibitions in Texas, U. S. A.

"That's a pair for you!" proudly remarked Colonel McCready to a little group of soldiers and civilians intently looking skyward, marking the swift and graceful approach through the sunlit air of a wide-winged biplane, the very queen of the Flying Squadron.

With whirring motor stilled, the great bird for a moment hovered over the parade ground, then glided to the earth, ran for a short distance along the ground and stopped a few feet from the admiring circle.

"That's a pair for you!" repeated Colonel McCready, as he reached for the shoulders of the youth whose master hand had set the planes for the exquisitely exact landing and gave a kindly nod to the young companion of the pilot.

"I'll wager," continued the colonel delightedly,

"that it was a painless cutting of Texas air, this flight; too fast to stick anywhere. Fifty-five miles in sixty minutes, or better, I think, and just a couple of kids—size them up, gentlemen—Mr. William Thomas Barry and Mr. Henri Armond Trouville."

Billy Barry adroitly climbed out of the little cockpit behind the rudder wheel and patiently submitted to the colonel's hearty slaps on the back. Billy never suffered from nerves—he never had any nerves, only "nerve," as his Uncle Jacob up in the land where the spruce comes from used to say. Billy's uncle furnished the seasoned wood for aëroplane building, and Billy's brother Joe was boss of the factory where the flyers are made. Billy knew the business from the ground up, and down, too, it might be added.

And let it be known that that Henri Trouville is also a boy of some parts in the game of flying. He loved mechanics, trained right in the shops, and even aspired to radiotelegraphy, map making aloft, and other fine arts of the flying profession. Henri has nerves and also nerve. He weighs fifty pounds less than Billy, but could put the latter to his best scuffle in a wrestling match. Both of them hustled every waking minute—the only difference being that pay days meant more to Billy than they did to Henri.

No brothers were ever more firmly knit than they

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—this hardy knot of spruce from Maine, U. S. A., and this good young sprout from the lilies of France.

There's a pair for you!

"Say, Colonel," said Billy, with a fine attempt at salute, "if I didn't know the timber in those paddles I wouldn't have felt so gay when we hit the cross-currents back yonder. I——"

"Yes, yes," laughed the colonel, "you are always ready to offer a trade argument when I want to show you off. Now you come out of your shell, Henri, and tell us what you think of the new engine."

"There is sure some high power in that make, sir," replied Henri. "Never stops, either, until you make it."

"All you boys need," broke in Major Packard, "is a polishing bit of instruction in military reconnoissance, and you would be a handy aid for the service."

"While I am only factory broke, Major," modestly asserted Billy, "Henri there can draw a pretty good map on the wing, if that counts for anything, and do the radio reporting as good as the next. What a fellow he is, too, with an engine; he can tell by the cough in three seconds just where the trouble is. If I was going into the scout business,

believe me, I might be able to make a hit by dropping information slips through the card chute."

The dark-eyed, slender Henri shook a finger at his talkative comrade.

"Spare me, old boy, if you please," he plead. "Gentlemen," turning to the others, who were watching the housing of the *aéroplane*, "this bluffer wouldn't even speak to me when the altitude meter, a little while ago, registered 3,000 feet. Then he had a wheel in his hands; down here he has it in his head!"

"Bully for you, comrade," cried Billy. "I couldn't have come back that neatly if I tried. But then, you know, I have to work to live, and you only live to work."

With this happy exchange the boys moved double quick in the direction of quarters and the mess table.

Colonel McCready, with the others proceeding to leisurely follow the eager food seekers, in his own peculiar style went on to say:

"There's a couple of youngsters who have been riding a buckboard through some fifty miles of space, several thousand feet from nowhere, at a clip that would razzle-dazzle an eagle, and, by my soul, they act like they had just returned from a croquet tournament!"

Our Aviator Boys had grown fearless as air riders. They had learned just what to do in cases of emergency, in fact were trained to the hour in

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cross-country flying. Rare opportunity, however, was soon to present itself to give them a supreme test of courage and skill.

Little they reckoned, this June evening down by the Alamo, what the near future held in store for them.

CHAPTER III.

FAREWELL TO THE FACTORY.

AN archduke had been killed on Servian soil, and war had raised its dreadful shadow over stricken Liège. The gray legions of the Kaiser were worrying the throat of France. From the far-off valley of the Meuse came a call of distress for Henri Trouville.

Billy Barry was very busy that day with the work of constructing hollow wooden beams and struts, and had just completed an inspection of a brand-new monoplane which the factory had sold to a rich young fellow who had taken a fancy to the flying sport. Coming out of the factory, he met his chum and flying partner. Henri did not wear his usual smile. With downcast head and his hands clasped behind him he was a picture of gloom.

"Hello, Henri, what's hurting you?" was Billy's anxious question.

"Billy boy," Henri sadly replied, "it's good night

to you and the factory for me. I'm going home."

"Say, Buddy," cried Billy, holding up his arm as though to ward off a shock, "where did you get your fever? Must have been overwarm in your shop to-day."

"It's straight goods," persisted Henri. "The world has fallen down on Trouville and I've got to go back and find what is under it."

Billy with a sob in his voice: "Old pal, if it's you—then it's you and me for it. I don't care whether it's mahogany, ash, spruce, lance-wood, black walnut or hickory in the frame, we'll ride it together."

"Oh, Billy!" tearfully argued Henri; "it's a flame into which you'd jump—and—and—it wouldn't do at all. So, be a good fellow and say good-by right here and get it over."

"You can't shake me." Billy was very positive in this. "We made 'em look up at Atlantic City. We can just as well cause an eye-strain at Ostend or any other old point over the water. The long way to Tipperary or the near watch on the Rhine—it's all one to me. I'm going, going with you, Buddy. Here's a hand on it!"

The boys passed together through the factory gate, looking neither to the right nor to the left, nor backward—on their way to great endeavor and to perils they knew not of.

Out to sea in a mighty Cunarder, the "flying

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kids," as everybody aboard called them, chiefly interested themselves in the ship's collection of maps. As they did not intend to become soldiers they were too shrewd to go hunting 'round war zone cities asking questions as to how to get to this place or that. They had no desire to be taken for spies.

"Right here, Billy," said Henri, indicating with pencil point, "is where we would be to-night if I could borrow the wings of a gull."

Billy, leaning over the map, remarked that a crow's wings would suit him better, adding:

"For we would certainly have to do some tall dodging in that part of the country just now."

"Do you know," questioned Henri earnestly, "that I haven't told you yet of the big driving reason for this dangerous journey?"

"Well," admitted Billy, "you didn't exactly furnish a diagram, but that didn't make much difference. The main point to me was that you tried to say good-by to your twin."

"Billy," continued Henri, drawing closer, and in voice only reaching the ear at his lips, "behind a panel in the Château Trouville are gold and jewels to the value of over a million francs. It is all that remains of a once far greater fortune. My mother, when all hope of turning back the invading armies had gone, fled to Paris in such haste that she took with her little more of worth than the rings on her hands. She may be in want even now—and she

never wanted before in her life. I am her free man—my brothers are in the trenches with the Allies somewhere, I don't know where. It's up to me to save her fortune and pour it into her lap."

"It's the finest thing I know," said Billy. "Show me the panel!"

Planning their first movement abroad, the boys that night decided to make for Dover after landing. It was a most convenient point from which to proceed to the French coast, and there they expected to find two tried and true friends, airmen, too, Captain Leonidas Johnson and Josiah Freeman, formerly employed as experts in the factory at home, and both of whom owed much to Billy's uncle in the way of personal as well as business favors.

What happened at Dover has already been told, and now to return to them, stranded in the water off the Belgian coast.

CHAPTER IV.

DRAGGED BY A ZEPPELIN.

FOR hours Billy had been stationed as lookout on the stranded hydroplane. He was taking cat-naps, for it had been quite a while since he last enjoyed a bed. While an expected round-shot from the

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shore did not come to disturb the tired airmen, something else happened just about as startling. In a waking moment Billy happened to look up, and there he saw a great dirigible circling above the harbor. The boy's eyes were wide open now.

"Henri," he loudly whispered, prodding his sleeping chum with a ready foot. "Look alive, boy! They're coming after us from the top side!"

Henri, alive in a jiffy, passed a friendly kick to Captain Johnson, and he in turn bestowed a rib jab upon Freeman. Then all eyes were glued on the hovering Zeppelin.

A mile seaward, from the armored side of a gunboat, burst a red flash wreathed by smoke; then a dull boom. The Zeppelin majestically swerved to southwest course, all the time signaling to masked batteries along the shore.

"There is bigger game around here than us," said Captain Johnson. "If only those tanks were chockfull of petrol again we'd show them all a clean pair of heels."

"If we don't move somehow and soon," gloomily put in Freeman, "we'll be dead wood between two fires."

The Zeppelin was now pushing skyward, buzzing like a million bees. Just then a Taube aeroplane, armored, swooped toward the gunboat, evidently British, which had endeavored to pot the Zeppelin. The scout-ship below turned its anti-aircraft can-

non and rifles against the latest invader, cutting its wings so close that the Taube hunted a higher and safer level. The Zeppelin had again lowered its huge hulk for the evident purpose of dropping on the gunboat some of the bombs stored in its special armored compartment.

Another sputtering jet of flame from the gunboat and one of the forward propellers of the airship collapsed and a second shot planted a gash in her side. Sagging and wobbling, the dirigible headed for the Belgian coast. When the black mass loomed directly above the stranded sea-plane, Freeman gave a warning shout:

"Down with you! She's trailing her anchor!"

By quick thought, in that thrilling, fleeting moment, Billy grabbed the swinging anchor as it was dragged along near to him and deftly hooked one of its prongs under the gun carriage at the sea-plane's bow.

With jerks that made every strut and wire crackle under the strain, the hydroplane, on its polished floats, skipped over the waves, pulled this way and that, now with elevated nose, now half under water, but holding firmly to the trailing cable.

Henri, with head over the wind-screen, keenly watched the shore for a likely landing-place. The men in the cars of the disabled Zeppelin did not seem to notice the extra weight on the anchor—

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they had troubles of their own in getting the damaged dirigible to safe landing.

Billy crouched in the bow-seat, his eyes fixed on the straining cable. In his right hand he clutched a keen-edged hatchet, passed forward by Freeman. Half drowned by the spray tossed in his face he awaited the word from Henri.

"Say when, old pard," he cried, slightly turning his head.

"If she pulls straight up and down," remarked Captain Johnson in Freeman's ear, "it's good night."

The coast line seemed rushing toward the incoming sea-plane, bouncing about in the wide wash.

Henri sighted a friendly looking cove, and excitedly sang out the word for which his chum was waiting:

"Now!"

With the signal Billy laid the hatchet with sounding blows upon the cable—and none too soon the tough strands parted.

The sea-plane with the final snap of the hacked cable dashed into the drift and plowed half its length in the sandy soil. The Zeppelin bobbed away into the gathering dusk.

Following the bump, Captain Johnson set the first foot on the sand. Stretching himself, he fixed a glance of concern on the sea-plane.

"I wonder if there is a joint in that craft that

isn't loose?" he questioned. "But," he added, with a note of sorrow, "it's not likely she will ever see her station again, and so what's the difference?"

"It was some voyage, though," suggested Freeman in the way of comfort.

"It was bully," maintained Billy. "If we had traveled any other way, Henri there would no doubt by this time have been wearing red trousers and serving the big guns around Paris, and I might have been starving while trying to get change for a ten-dollar bill in that big town."

"Do you think you will like it better," asked Freeman, "to stand up before a firing squad with a handkerchief tied 'round your eyes?"

"I should worry," laughed Billy.

"There's no scare in you, boy," said Captain Johnson, giving Billy an affectionate tap on the back. "Now," he continued seriously, "it's hard to tell just what sort of reception we are going to get hereabouts. Old Zip and I" (turning to Freeman) "certainly made the people on the paved 'board-walk' stare with some of our flying stunts. But that was last year."

"That reminds me," broke in Billy, "that I have given the high ride to several of the big 'noises' on all sides of the war, and they one and all promised me the glad hand if I ever came to see them."

"That, too," said Freeman, with a grin, "was a year or more ago."

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"Speaking of time," put in Henri, "it also seems to me a matter of a year or two since I had anything to eat. I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"I'm with you on the eat proposition," Billy promptly cast his vote. "Where's the turkey hid, Captain?"

"It's a lot of turkey you'll get this night," grimly replied the captain. "There's a little snack of sandwiches in the hold, cold roast, I believe, but that's all. We didn't equip for a sail like this."

Billy and Henri lost no time rummaging for the sandwiches, and while the meat and bread were being consumed to the last crumb by the hungry four, Billy furnished an idea in place of dessert:

"We don't want to lose ten thousand dollars' worth of flying machine on this barren shore. Henri and I are going to do a bit of scouting while the soldier crowd are busy among themselves up the coast. If there is any petrol to be had we are going to have it."

Fitting action to the words, the two boys moved with stealthy tread, Indian fashion, toward the ridge that shadowed and concealed the temporary camp of the airmen. Captain Johnson did not wholly approve of this venture on the part of the boys, but they did not give him time to argue against it, and were soon beyond recall.

CHAPTER V.

RAN AWAY WITH AN AUTOMOBILE.

NIGHT had come and in front of one of the handsome hotels that had escaped splintering when Ostend, the famous seaside resort, under fire of big guns, was swept by shot and shell, Gun-Lieutenant Mertz had just stepped out of a big gray automobile that looked like a high speeder—the kind that has plenty of power. The driver of the car did not wait for a second order to leave the lieutenant and speed away in the direction of the mess quarters, where he knew that there was a fragrant stew being prepared for duty men coming in late.

The fighting of the day had mostly taken place far up the coast, and the chance had arrived for a loosening of belts in Ostend.

With a final chug the big gray car came to a standstill in a quiet corner off the main street, while the hungry chauffeur joined his comrades in what they called pot-luck. The movements of this man had been watched with a large amount of interest by a pair of visitors, who had chosen the darkest places they could find while approaching the dining hall of the soldiers.

“Gee!” whispered one of the watchers to the other. “I can almost feel a bullet in my back.”

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From the companion shadow: "Take your foot out of my face, can't you?"

Two heads uplifted at the sight of the rear lights of the car.

Again an excited whisper:

"Now for it, Billy!"

The soldiers were laughing and talking loudly in the dining hall.

The boys crawled along, carefully avoiding the light that streamed from the windows of the hall. A moment later they nimbly climbed into the car. Henri took the wheel and gently eased the big machine away into the shadowy background. Then he stopped the car and intently listened for any sound of alarm. The soldiers were singing some war song in the dining hall, keeping time with knives and forks.

It was a good time for the boys to make a start in earnest, and they started with no intention of stopping this side of the ridge, behind which their friends were anxiously watching and waiting for them.

Henri drove cautiously until he felt sure that they were out of the principal avenues of travel, and then he made things hum. He guided straight toward a clump of trees showing black against the moon just appearing above the crest of the hill. The riding grew rough, but the speed never slack-

ened. At last the goal was reached. The car bumped and bounced up, and bounced and bumped down the hill.

Leaping from the machine, Billy fairly rolled to the feet of the startled crew of the sea-plane.

"So help me," exclaimed Captain Johnson, "if I didn't think it was a section of the Fourth Corps after our scalps!"

"Hurry!" gasped Billy. "Get anything that will hold oil, and get it quick!"

For the moment confused, Johnson and Freeman seemed tied fast to the ground.

Henri rolled into the circle and added his gasp:

"We've a touring car up there and its tanks are loaded!"

Then the boss mechanic, Freeman, came to the front. From the depths of the engine room in the motor end of the sea-plane he pulled a heavy coil of rubber tubing and in a few minutes made attachments that tapped the automobile's plentiful supply of petrol and sent it gurgling into the empty tanks of the sea-plane.

Across the sandy plain came the sound, faintly, of shouting. Maybe somebody had discovered that the officer's car was missing.

As Billy suggested with a laugh:

"Perhaps they think some joy riders took it."

"I'm not going to stay to find out what they

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think," very promptly asserted Captain Johnson. "Heave her out, boys!"

The sea-plane took the water like a duck. Obedient to Johnson's touch it leaped upward, the motors were humming, and with a cheery cackle Freeman announced:

"We're off again."

"And they are showing us the way," cried Billy, as a great searchlight inland sent a silver shaft directly overhead.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Riflemen on the ridge were popping at the sea-plane.

"There's a salute for good measure," observed Henri.

"Lucky we're out of range of those snipers, but I'm thinking the batteries might attempt to take a whack at us."

With these words Captain Johnson set the planes for another jump skyward.

"There's the good old moon to bluff the searchlight," sang out Billy from the lookout seat. "And, see, there's a row of smokestacks sticking out of the water. Sheer off, Captain; don't let those cruisers pump a shot at us. They'd wreck this flyer in a minute!"

The sea-plane was taking the back-track at fine speed when valve trouble developed in the engine room. The cylinders were missing fire, and all of Freeman's expert tinkering failed to prevent the

necessity of rapid descent. The hum of the motors died away, and Captain Johnson dived the craft seaward with almost vertical plunge. The sea-plane hit the water with a dipping movement that raised a fountain over the lookout, and it was Billy that cried "Ugh!" when he was drenched from head to foot by the downfall of several gallons of cold water.

The aircraft had alighted only a few rods from land, in a shallow, marshy bay. The place was as silent as the grave, save for the calling of the night birds and the gentle lapping of the waves. Freeman with the aid of an extra propeller fitting, paddled the craft into shore, and was soon busy trying to find out what was the matter with the machinery. Captain Johnson held the acetylene flare over Freeman's shoulder to enable the engineer to see where repair was needed.

Billy and Henri, out of a job for the time being, concluded that they would do some exploring. After wading through the mud, weeds and matted grass for a hundred yards or so they reached firm footing on higher ground.

CHAPTER VI.

DEATH RIDE OF AN AVIATOR.

THE moon was shining brightly, and over the plain that stretched out before them on the left the boys could see quite a distance, but no sign of human life presented itself. On the right, however, a half mile away, was a sharp rise of ground and tall trees. Toward this point they decided to proceed. Then it was that they first realized the experience of standing on a battlefield.

Crossing the field they saw the ravages of artillery projectiles—deep, conical holes, five or six feet in diameter. Here, too, they found shrapnel cases, splinters of shells, skeletons of horses, fragments of bloodstained clothing and cartridge pouches. The moonlight made the path as open as day, and each object reminding of terrible conflict was apparently magnified by the white shine of the moon. The boys walked as in a dream, and were first awakened by the flapping wings of a huge bird, frightened by their approach from its perch on a broken gun-carriage.

"Let's get out of this," mumbled Henri; "it gives me shivery shakes; it's a graveyard, and it seems like ghosts of dead soldiers are tracking us."

Billy was short on nerves, but if he had been

called on for a confession just then he might have plead guilty to a tremble or two.

He managed to put on a bold front, however, and was about to give Henri a brace by telling him they would have to get used to the ways of war, when there was a sound like the roll of distant thunder far to the south.

"What's that?"

Billy's sudden question drove the ghosts away from Henri's mind, and both boys ran like deer up the hill to the line of trees.

"There's no storm over there," panted Henri. "You can't see a cloud as big as a man's hand."

"That isn't thunder!" exclaimed Billy. "That's cannon! They're shooting at something!"

"There," cried Henri, "that sounds like fire-crackers now."

"Rifles," observed Billy.

"Look!" Billy was pointing to what appeared, at the distance, to be a speck on the face of the moon.

The sound of gunfire increased, report after report—crack, crack, boom, boom, boom.

Across and far above the moonlit plain, arrow-like, sped a winged shadow, growing in size as it swiftly approached.

"An aëroplane!" The boys well knew that kind of a bird. They called its name in one voice.

"That's what has been drawing the fire of those guns."

Billy had found the problem easy to solve when he noted the getaway tactics of the coming airman.

The boys could now hear the whirring of the motor. Fifty yards away the aeroplane began to descend. Gracefully it volplaned to the earth under perfect control. It landed safely, rolled a little way, and stopped.

The boys, without a second thought, raced down the slope to greet the aviator, like one of their own kind should be greeted, but as quickly halted as they drew nearer.

The airman was dead.

He had been fatally wounded at the very start of his last flight, but just before death, at its finish, had set his planes for a descent. With his dead hands gripping the controllers, the craft had sailed to the earth. He wore the yellowish, dirt-colored khaki uniform of a British soldier.

Billy and Henri removed their caps in reverence to valor and to honor the memory of a gallant comrade who had been game to the last.

Releasing the dead aviator from his death grip on the controllers, the boys tenderly lifted the corpse from the driver's seat in the machine and covered the upturned face and glazed eyes with the muffler the airman had worn about his neck. The

body was that of a youth of slight build, but well muscled. In the pockets of his blouse the boys found a pencil, a memorandum book and a photograph, reduced to small size by cutting round the face—a motherly type, dear to all hearts.

The usual mark of identity of soldiers in the field was missing, but on the third finger of the left hand was a magnificent seal ring, on which was engraved an eagle holding a scroll in its beak and clutching a sheaf of arrows in its talons.

Billy took possession of these effects with silent determination to some day deliver them to the pictured mother, if she could be found.

“The ring shows that he came of a noble house,” said Henri, who had some knowledge of heraldry.

“He was a brave lad, for all that, and noble in himself,” remarked Billy, who had the American idea that every man is measured by his own pattern.

So they gave the dead youth the best burial they could, at the foot of one of the giant trees, and sadly turned away to inspect the aëroplane that had been so strangely guided.

It was a beautiful machine, all the fine points visible to their practiced eyes—a full-rigged military biplane, armor plates and all. The tanks of extra capacity were nearly full of petrol.

“It must have been a short journey, as well as a fatal one,” said Billy. “Very likely the launching

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was from a British ship, not far out at sea, and the purpose was to make a lookover of the German land forces around here."

"I'd like to take a little jaunt in that machine," sighed Henri, who could not tear himself away from the superb flyer.

"It may turn out that you will—stranger things have happened."

Billy proved to be a prophet, but it was not a "little jaunt," but a long ride that the boys took in that aëroplane.

An unpleasant surprise was in immediate store for them.

They decided that it was about time that they should return to their friends and the sea-plane, and were full of and eager to tell Johnson and Freeman of the results of their scouting.

"Guess the captain won't wonder at anything we do since we brought that automobile into camp," declared Billy. "You know he said that he hadn't any breath to save for our next harum-scarum performance."

"I can just see Freeman grin when I tell him that we have found a flying-machine that can beat his sea-sailer a mile. That's my part of the story, you know," added Henri.

"I can't help thinking of the poor fellow who rode her last," was Billy's sober response.

The boys were nearing the point where the heavy

walking began. Otherwise they would have broken into a run, so eager were they to tell about their adventures.

Coming out of the weeds and ooze, they stood looking blankly at the spot where the sea-plane had rested.

The sea-plane and their friends were gone!

CHAPTER VII.

ALONE ON A STRANGE COAST.

WHEN the boys made the startling discovery that the sea-plane had disappeared and that they were alone on the strange coast, they plumped down on the sand without a single idea in the world except that they were utterly tired out and weak from hunger.

They could not account in any way for the mysterious happening that had deprived them of their tried and true friends.

Not for a moment did they imagine that they had been deserted by intent. They knew full well that even in the face of great danger Captain Johnson and Josiah Freeman were not the kind of men who would fly away, without sign or signal, and leave a comrade in distress, let alone these boys for whom either of the men would have spilled his last drop of blood.

"The coast patrol nabbed them," was the opinion of Billy.

"They were held up at the point of a bayonet, I'll bet," argued Henri, "for there is no sign of a struggle, and we would have heard it if there had been any shooting."

"However it was," figured Billy, "they never quit of their own accord; they would never have left us unless they had been hauled away by force. Now it is up to us to skirmish for ourselves, which, anyhow, I expected to do sooner or later. There's no use staying here, for they will be coming after us next."

Wearily the boys plodded through the slush, backtracking to the foot of the hill where they had left the *aéroplane*. The fading moon was lost behind a wall of slowly rising mist, and the dawn was breaking in the east when the boys finally stumbled upon the place that held their prize. Wholly exhausted, they threw themselves full length upon the ground and slept like logs.

The sun was broadly shining when Billy reached out a lazy arm to poke his chum, who was snuggled up in the grass and breathing like a porpoise.

"Get up and hear the birds sing," yawned Billy.

"I'd a good sight rather hear a kettle or a coffee-pot sing," yawned Henri.

"Right O," agreed Billy.

The boys rolled over alongside of the aëroplane. A twin thought came to them that the late aviator surely must have carried something to eat with him.

It proved a glorious truth. There was a knapsack behind the driver's seat and a canteen swinging under the upper plane.

"A meat pie!" Billy made the first find.

"Crackers and cheese!" Heard from Henri.

How good these rations tasted—even the lukewarm water in the canteen was like nectar. With new life the boys took up the problem presented by the next move.

Henri climbed into the aëroplane and very carefully inspected the delicate machinery, making free use of the oil can. Billy otherwise attended to the tuning of the craft, and everything was as right as a trivet in less than a half hour.

"Let me see"—Billy was thumbing a well-worn notebook—"as we fixed it on the steamer, Dunkirk was the starting place. But that storm entirely changed the route—a longer way round, I guess. No more Ostend for me, though I do wish I knew for sure whether or not they had Captain Johnson and Freeman locked up there. Let's try for Bruges; that's only a short distance from here, and we can follow the line of the canal so we won't get lost."

"And we can fly high," suggested Henri, "high enough to keep from getting plugged."

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"I am not bothering so much about the 'high' part of it as I am about where we'll land," said Billy. "We may fall into a hornet's nest."

"Let's make it Bruges, for luck," suggested Henri.

"Here goes, then," exclaimed Billy, getting into steering position, Henri playing passenger.

Off they skimmed on the second stage of their journey to the valley of the Meuse, in France.

They had entered the zone where five nations were at each other's throats.

So swift was their travel that our Aviator Boys very soon looked down upon the famous old belfry of Bruges, the old gabled houses, with bright red tiled roofs, mirrored in the broad canal crossed by many stone bridges. That is what Bruges means, "bridges." To the young airmen, what the town meant just now was a good dinner, if they did not have to trade their lives or their liberty for a chance to get it.

"Nothing doing here," lamented Henri, who did the looking down while Billy looked ahead. "I see that there are too many gray-coats visiting in West Flanders. And I heard that the Belgians have not been giving 'days at home' since the army came. Now I see that it is true."

"Having fun with yourself?" queried Billy, in the sharp tone necessary to make himself heard in a buzzing aircraft.

Henri ignored the question, snapping: "The book says it's thirty-five miles from here to Ypres, straight; keep your eyes on the waterways, and you can't miss it."

"Another thing the book says," snapped Billy, in response, "is that that old town is in a district as flat as a floor, and, if nothing else, we are sure of a landing."

"I wish we were as sure of a dinner." Henri never lost sight of the dinner question.

The flight was continued in silence. It was a strain to keep up conversation, and the boys quit talking to rest their throats. Besides, there was not a drop of water left in the canteen.

It was late afternoon when the boys saw Ypres beneath them. It was just about the time that the Allies were advancing in the region between Ypres and Roulers, the town where the best Flemish lace comes from. But the Allies had not yet reached Ypres.

Henri glimpsed the remains of some ancient fortifications, and urged Billy to make a landing right there.

"A good place to hide in case of emergency," he advised.

Billy agreed, set the planes for a drop, and came down neatly in the open.

"We ought to be able to get a change of linen here, for that's the big business in this town." Henri

was pretty well posted, for in his cradle he had slept on Ypres linen.

There was no work going on in the fertile fields around the town. The Belgian peasants thereabouts were either under arms or under cover.

"When King Louis set up these old ramparts he probably did not look forward to the day when they would provide a hangar for a flying-machine." This from Billy, who was pushing the aëroplane to the shelter of a crumbling fortalice.

"If we had dropped in on the fourteenth century, as we did to-day," observed Henri, "I'll warrant that we would have scared everybody out of Flanders."

"It doesn't appear, as it is, that there is a person around here bold enough to approach us."

Billy seemed surprised that they had not run into trouble at the very start.

"'Never trouble trouble till trouble troubles you,' " quoted Henri. "It goes something like that, I think."

"Listen!" Billy raised a hand to warn Henri not to move nor speak aloud. The sound that had put Billy on the alert was a long, low whistle. It was repeated, now and again. Curious, and also impressed that the whistler was trying to attract their attention, they began a search among the ruins. Over the top of a huge slab of stone suddenly popped a red cap, covering a regular Tom Thumb

among Belgians—about four feet from tow head to short boots.

Henri said "Howdy" to him in French, at the same time extending a friendly hand. The youngster, evidently about fifteen, shyly gave Henri two fingers in greeting. He bobbed his head to Billy. Then he removed his red cap and took out of it a soiled and crumpled slip of paper. On the slip, apparently torn from a notebook, was scribbled:

"This boy saw you fly in, told us how you looked, and, if it is you, this will let you know that the Germans brought us here for safe-keeping yesterday. CAP."

"Glory be!" Billy could hardly contain himself, and the little Belgian took his first lesson in tangoing from an American instructor. "As soon as it is dark we will move on the outer works," was his joyous declaration.

"Say, my young friend," he added, "do you know where we can get a bite to eat while we're waiting?" Henri translated, and the little Belgian was off like a shot. About dusk he returned with some bread and bologna, looped up in a fancy colored handkerchief. And there was plenty of water in the Yperlee river.

Along about 11 o'clock that night Leon, the little Belgian, whispered, "*Venez*" (Come).

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE DARK NIGHT IN YPRES.

THE sky had turned dark over Ypres, rain had commenced to fall in streets so remarkably clean that they really did not need this bath from above. It was just the kind of a night, though, for the risky venture undertaken by our Aviator Boys. They were going to see their old friends, and nothing but a broken leg would check their willing steps on the way to the prison house that contained Captain Johnson and Josiah Freeman.

Leon knew the best way to get there. The darkest ways were light to him, and he was not afraid that rain would spoil his clothes. To guide these wonderful flying boys was the happiest thing that had happened to him in all his days, and, too, he had a strong dislike for the Germans who had invaded the homeland. His father was even now fighting in the ranks of the Allies at Nieuport, and his mother was wearing her heart out in the fields as the only breadwinner for her little brood.

There were comparatively few of the gray troops then in the town. The main columns were moving north to the Dixmude region, where the horizon was red with burning homes. To guard prisoners, garrison the town and care for the wounded not

many soldiers were then needed in Ypres, and non-commissioned officers mostly were in command.

The streets were empty and silent, and lights only occasionally seen. At midnight Billy, Henri and Leon paused in the deep shadow of a tall elm, the branches of which swept the front of the dingy red brick dwelling, two stories in height and heavily hung with vines. Leon knew the place like a book, for he had been serving as an errand boy for the guards quartered there.

He whispered to Henri that the men who had sent the note were in the front room on the second floor.

Behind the brick wall at the side of the house was a garden. Billy and Henri, on Leon's advice, decided to try the deep-set door in the garden wall as the only way to get in without stirring up the sentry in the front hall. With the first push on the door the rusty hinges creaked loudly.

The front door of the house was thrown open, and a shaft of light pierced the darkness. The boys backed up against the wall, scarcely daring to breathe. The soldier looked up at the clouds, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, muttered something to himself, turned back and slammed the door with a bang. At this the boys gave a backward heave, and were through the door and into the garden.

This interior was blacker than the mouth of an

inkwell. Billy cautiously forced the door back in place.

"Got any matches?" Billy had failed to find any in his own pockets.

Henri was better supplied. In the military *aéroplane* he had not only found matches, but also a box of tapers, and he had taken the precaution of putting them in his pockets when they left the machine.

With a little flame, carefully shaded, the boys discovered a shaky-looking ladder in a grape-arbor at the back of the garden.

By degrees, foot by foot, they edged the ladder alongside of the house, and gently hoisted it to the window of the upper room, which Leon had assured them was the right one.

"Let's shy some pebbles against the window to let them know we are here," was the whispered suggestion of Henri.

"Nothing doing." Billy was going to have a look in first. He was already crawling up the ladder. Henri laid hold of the lower rungs, to keep the rickety frame steady, and Leon stationed himself at the garden door, ready and alert to give warning whistle if anything happened in front.

Billy tapped softly on the window pane. The sash was silently raised, and Billy crept in.

Not a word had been spoken, and no signal from the room above.

Standing in the dark and the rain in the dismal garden, Henri was of half a mind to follow his comrade without further delay. It was an anxious moment.

A bird-like trill from Leon. With this call Henri left the ladder and tiptoed to the garden door to join the little Belgian and find out what was the matter.

From far up the silent street, coming with measured tread, a regiment was marching. The watchers at the door of the garden now plainly heard gruff commands and the other usual sounds of military movement.

"I must let Billy know; the soldiers are headed this way and might be coming to move the prisoners somewhere else."

Henri had started back toward the house, when suddenly the window was thrown up, and, with a sound like the tearing of oil-cloth, Billy came down the ladder and landed with a bump on the graveled walk.

Henri and Leon, in the space of a second, rushed to the side of their fallen comrade.

In the street outside there was a crash that shook the silence as though the silence was solid. A regiment had grounded arms directly in front of the house.

Billy, who for a moment had been stunned by the force of his bump into the walk, at the end of

a twenty-foot slide, jumped to his feet, and in a breath urged his companions to run.

"Let's get out of this; over the wall with you!"

The boys bolted for the back wall of the garden, dragging the ladder, and speedily mingled on all fours on the coping, the top of which was strewn with broken glass.

Hanging by their hands on the outer side of the wall they chanced the long drop. As luck would have it, they landed in soft places—on a pile of ashes and garbage.

Lights sprang up in the windows of the house behind them. It was evident that a change of base was to be made.

"Did you see our fellows?" was Henri's first eager question, as he shook off his coat of ashes.

"You bet I did," coughed Billy, whose face had plowed a furrow in the ash heap. "A bunch of the gray men in a motor boat pounced on them while they were tinkering with the sea-plane and took them and the plane in tow to Ostend. They were brought down here so that General So and So, I don't remember who, could look them over, but the general and his brigade have gone off somewhere to the north to try and stop the advance of the Allies. The captain and Freeman both say they are in no special danger and are very kindly treated. They have their papers as American citizens and agents abroad for our factory. Then there is the

storm story as their reason for being blown into the war zone without fighting clothes.

"How did I come to quit that house yonder like a skyrocket? Well, just as the captain and I had finished exchanging experiences, and old Josh Freeman had nearly broken my ribs with a bear hug, one of the rounders in the house concluded to pay a visit to the room where we were. We didn't hear him until he reached the top of the stairs, where he stopped to sneeze. With that sneeze I did my leaping act. That soldier never saw me; I'll wager on that."

"What'll we do now?" That was more what Henri wanted to know.

"Get back to the machine before daylight." Billy's main idea was that the safest place was a couple of thousand feet in the air.

Daylight was not far away. Henri and Leon held a committee meeting to determine the best route back to the fortifications. The little Belgian was sure of his ground, and before sunrise, by countless twists and turns, the trio were back to the stone hangar where the aëroplane rested.

The first faint streaks of dawn gave light enough for Billy to do his tuning work about the machine. Henri was bending over, in the act of testing the fuel supply, when there was a thud of horses' hoofs on all sides of the enclosure, followed by a shrill cry from Leon:

"Sauvez vous! Vite! Vite!" (Save yourself! Quick! Quick!)

With that the little Belgian frantically tugged at the *aéroplane*, and not until our Aviator Boys had swung the machine into the open and leaped to their places in the frame did the brave youngster quit his post. Then he ran like a rabbit, waving quick farewell, and disappeared in the wilderness of stone.

Lickety clip the *aéroplane* moved over the ground. Then up and away!

A pistol shot rang out. A cavalryman nearest to the point of flight was behind the weapon.

Barely a hundred feet in the air and Henri leaned heavily against Billy.

"I'm hit!" he gasped, "but don't let go. Keep her going!"

CHAPTER IX.

TESTING BILLY'S NERVE.

It was indeed a severe test of Billy Barry's nerve that was put upon him in this trying moment. To let go of the controllers of the *aéroplane* would mean the finish; to neglect for an instant his comrade, whom he believed to be bleeding to death, was agony. Almost blindly he set the planes for a nearly vertical descent from a dizzy height of three thousand feet which the machine had attained be-

fore Billy had fully realized that he was holding across his knees the inert body of his beloved chum. Like a plummet the aircraft dropped eastward. With rare presence of mind Billy shifted for a rise when close to the ground, and managed to land without wrecking the machine. A scant ten feet, though, to the right, and the aëroplane would have crashed into a cow-shed and all would have been over.

An old woman, digging potatoes nearby, was so frightened when this winged bolt came down from the sky that she gave a squawk and fell backward into the big basket behind her.

When Billy had tenderly lifted out and laid Henri upon the turf, he ran to the well in front of the neat farmhouse, filled his leather cap with water, and hastened back to bathe the deathly pale face and throbbing temples of his wounded chum. With the cooling application Henri opened his eyes and smiled at the wild-eyed lad working with all his soul to win him back to life.

"I am not done for yet, old scout," he faintly murmured.

Billy gulped down a sob.

"You're coming around all right, Buddy," cried Billy, holding a wet and loving hand upon Henri's forehead.

"The pain is in my right shoulder," advised

Henri; "I have just begun to feel it. Guess that is where the bullet went in."

"Let me see it." Billy assumed a severe professional manner. The attempt, however, to remove the jacket sleeve from the injured arm brought forth such a cry of pain from Henri that Billy drew back in alarm.

"Ask the woman for a pair of shears," suggested Henri, "and cut away the sleeve."

"Hi, there!" called Billy to the old woman, who had risen from the basket seat, but still all of a tremble.

"Get her here," urged Henri. "I can make her understand."

Billy, bowing and beckoning, induced the woman to approach.

Henri, politely:

"*Madame, j'ai ete blesse. Est-ce que nous restons ici?*" (Madam, I have been wounded. Can we rest here?)

"*Je n'ecoute pas bien. J'appellerai, Marie.*" (I do not hear good. I will call Marie.)

With that the old woman hobbled away, and quickly reappeared with "Marie," a kindly-eyed, fine type of a girl, of quite superior manner.

Henri questioned: "*Vous parlez le Français?*" (You speak French?)

"Oui, monsieur; j'ai demeure en le sud-est."

(Yes, monsieur; I have lived in the southeast.)

The girl quickly added, with a smiling display of a fine row of teeth: "And I speak the English, too. I have nursed the sick in London."

"Glory be!" Billy using his favorite expression. "Get busy!"

Marie "got busy" with little pocket scissors, cut the jacket and shirt free of the wound, washed away the clotted blood and soon brightly announced:

"No bullet here; it went right through the flesh, high up; much blood, but no harm to last."

Cutting up a linen hand-towel, Marie skillfully bandaged the wound, and, later, as neatly mended the slashes she had made in Henri's jacket and shirt.

For ten days the boys rested at the farmhouse, Henri rapidly recovering strength.

They learned much about Belgium from Marie. She laughingly told Henri that his French talk was good to carry him anywhere among the Walloons in the southeastern half of Belgium, but in the northwestern half he would not meet many of the Flemings who could understand him. "You would have one hard time to speak Flemish," she assured him.

Henri confided to Marie that they were bound for the valley of the Meuse.

"La la," cried the girl, "but you are taking the

long way. Yet," she continued, "you missed some fighting by coming the way you did from Bruges."

On the eleventh morning Henri told Billy at breakfast that he (Henri) was again as "fit as a fiddle." "Let's be moving," he urged.

"All right." Billy himself was getting restless. They had been absolutely without adventure for ten long days.

But, when Henri returned from a visit to the *aéroplane*, he wore a long face.

"There's no more 'ammunition' in the tanks," he wailed. "There isn't as much as two miles left."

"That means some hiking on the ground." With this remark Billy made a critical survey of his shoes. "Guess they'll hold out if the walking is good." Henri, however, was not in a humor to be amused.

"I say, Billy, what's the matter with making a try for Roulers? Trouble or no trouble, we'll not be standing around like we were hitched. It would be mighty easy if we could take the air. No use crying, though, about spilt milk."

Marie, who had been an attentive listener, putting on an air of mystery, called the attention of the boys to a certain spot on the cleanly scrubbed floor, over which was laid a small rug of home weaving. The girl pushed aside the rug and underneath was shown the lines of a trap-door, into which Marie inserted a chisel point. The opening below dis-

closed a short flight of steps leading down to an underground room, where candle light further revealed, among other household treasures, such as a collection of antique silver and the like, two modern bicycles.

"The boys who rode those," said Marie, pointing to the cycles, "may never use them again. They were at Liège when it fell, and never a word from them since. On good roads and in a flat country you can travel far on these wheels. Take them, and welcome, if you have to go."

In an hour the boys were on the road. They left two gold-pieces under the tablecloth and a first-class *aéroplane* as evidence of good faith.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE ROAD TO ROULERS.

OUR Aviator Boys had not for a long time been accustomed to use their legs as vigorously and so continuously as required to make an endurance record on a bicycle. They had no great use for legs when flying. But they were light-hearted, and had been well fed, had enough in their knapsacks to stave off hunger for several days, and, barring the fact that Henri was still nursing a sore shoulder, ready to meet the best or the worst. Billy carried

a compass, also a mind full of directions from Marie, and firmly believed that he could not miss the good old town in the fertile meadow on the little river Mander. At least Henri and himself could live or die trying.

They had already observed indications that, even with the strenuous call to the colors of the Belgian men, the little kingdom was thickly populated, and about every square inch of farm land was under close cultivation.

"Suppose people lived this close together in Texas," remarked Billy, as they pedaled along; "why, a man as tall across the front as Colonel McCready wouldn't have room enough to turn around."

"Yes, and from what we have heard of the war crowd working this way we'll have to have more room than this to keep from running into them." Henri was not in the same mood that he was when he found the *aéroplane* tanks empty.

"Nothing like a scare-mark so far," was Billy's comment. "I have seen only women in the fields."

"Even the dogs have work to do here."

Henri went on to explain that the small farmers, as a rule, cannot afford to keep horses, and just now could not keep them if they had them.

The boys had been fortunate in their first day's travel as cyclists, in that they had not even fallen in with the stragglers of the contending armies re-

ported in terrible conflict inside the Dixmude-Nieuport line.

In the afternoon of the second day, however, they took the wrong road, one leading to Bixchoote.

In the distance they heard heavy and continuous artillery fire, and decided to turn back. "Out of the frying-pan into what next?" as Billy put it, when they found the woods north of Ypres were aflame with bursting shells. Fighting in front and fighting in the rear.

"The sides are still open," declared Henri, "even if both ends are plugged."

"But which side shall it be?" asked Billy.

The situation was one of great peril to the boys.

To get a better idea of the lay of the land, they rolled their bicycles into the woods alongside the road and climbed into the low hanging branches of a huge tree, then ascended to the very top of this monarch of the forest.

From their lofty perch they could see quite a distance in all directions, but they had no eyes for any part of the panorama after the first glance to the south. The firing line stretched out before their vision, presenting an awe-inspiring scene.

The shell fire from the German batteries was so terrific that Belgian soldiers and French marines were continually being blown out of their dugouts and sent scattering to cover. The distant town was

invisible except for flames and smoke clouds rising above it.

The tide of battle streamed nearer to the wood where the boys had taken shelter. From their high point of vantage they were soon forced to witness one of the most horrible sights imaginable.

A heavy howitzer shell fell and burst in the midst of a Belgian battery, which was making its way to the front, causing awful destruction—mangled men and horses going down in heaps.

Henri was in a chill of horror, and Billy so shaken that it was with difficulty that they resisted a wild desire to jump into space—anything to shut out the appalling picture.

The next instant they were staring down upon a hand-to-hand conflict in the woods, within two hundred yards of the tree in which they were perched. British and Germans were engaged in a bayonet duel, in which the former force triumphed, leaving the ground literally covered with German wounded and dead, hardly a man in gray escaping the massacre.

"I can see nothing but red!" Henri was shaking like a leaf.

Billy gave his chum a sharp tap on the cheek with the palm of his hand, hoping thus to divert Henri's mind and restore his courage.

Billy himself had about all he could do to keep

his teeth together, but, by the unselfish devotion he gave to his comrade, he overcame his fear.

"Come, Buddy," he pleaded; "take a brace! Easy, now; there's a way to get out of this, I know there is. Put your foot here; your hand there; steady; we'll be off in a minute."

By the time the boys had descended to the lower branches of the tree, Henri was once more on "even keel," in the language of the aviator.

A long limb of the tree extended out over the road. On this the boys wormed their way to the very tip, intending to drop into the highway, recover their bicycles, and make a dash for safety across the country to the west, following the well defined trail worn smooth by the passage of ammunition wagons.

As they clung to the limb, intently listening and alert for any movement that would indicate a returning tide of battle in the immediate neighborhood, a riderless horse, a magnificent coal-black animal, carrying full cavalry equipment, came galloping down the road, urged to ever increasing speed by the whipping against its flanks of swinging holsters.

"Here's the one chance in the world!"

Billy swung himself around and leaned forward like a trapeze performer in a circus, preparing for a high dive into a net.

The horse's high-flung head just grazed the

leaves of the big branch, bent down under the weight of the boys.

Billy dropped astride of the racing charger, saved from a heavy fall in the road by getting a quick neck hold, seized the loose bridle reins with convulsive grip and brought the foam-flecked animal to a standstill within fifty yards. This boy had tamed more than one frisky broncho down in Texas, U. S. A., and for a horse wearing the kind of a curb bit in his mouth that this one did, Billy had a sure brake-setting pull.

Henri made a cat-fall into the dusty road and right speedily got the hand-up from his mounted comrade.

Off they went on the trail to the open west, with clatter of hoofs, and the wind blowing free in the set, white faces of the gallant riders.

CHAPTER XI.

THEY MEET A GENERAL.

"I DON'T know where we are going, but we're on the way," sang Billy, whose spirits now ranged to a high pitch. "This beats anything we've rung up yet in our target practice over here," he gloated. "Isn't he a jolly old roadster?" Billy had checked the horse to a slow canter, after a run of two miles.

"Let's have a bit of a rest." Henri's sore shoulder was troubling him. He still had his knapsack with some jumbled food in it. Billy had lost his food supply when he made his leap on the horse.

While the animal was cropping the short grass along the trail the riders took their ease by lounging on the turf and feeding on their crumbled lunch.

"This is a thirsty picnic," asserted Billy. "My throat is as dry as powder. Let's see if there isn't a spring 'round here."

Hooking the bridle reins over his arm, Billy led the way on a search for water. At the bottom of a wooded hill the boys found themselves in a marsh, and though bitter and brackish the water was a grateful relief to their parched tongues. The horse acted as though he had not had a drink for a week.

A little further on, in a meadow, the boys made a singular discovery. They were amazed to see an important looking personage in a gorgeous uniform, covered with decorations, wandering about the meadow like a strayed sheep.

"What the dickens is that?" exclaimed Henri.

"Give it up." Billy couldn't even make a guess. "He shows gay but harmless. I think I'll look him over."

On approaching the richly attired wanderer the boys with wonder noticed that he carried a gold-

tipped baton and from a shiny knapsack on his shoulders rolls of music protruded.

The strange being kept proclaiming that he was going to direct the German military music on a triumphal parade through the streets of Paris. Henri could understand that much of the disconnected talk, and also that the speaker was the head musician of the German army in Belgium. He had been cut off from his command and become possessed by a fit of melancholy from which the boys found it impossible to rouse him. They divided with him what remained of the contents of Henri's knapsack, but could not induce him to proceed with them.

"It's a pity that a man like that should lose his reason. But this dreadful war strikes in most any kind of way, and if it isn't one way it's another."

Henri was still thinking of the horrible happening when the Belgian battery was literally blown to pieces under his very eyes.

"There's a peaceful sleeper here, anyhow," said Billy, pausing, as they trudged along, leading the horse toward the trail. He pointed to a little mound above which had been set a rude wooden cross. It was the grave of a French soldier, for on the cross had been placed his cap, showing the name of his regiment. On the mound, too, had been scattered a few wild flowers.

"Somebody who had a heart for the cause or the fighter must have passed this way," observed Henri. "The burial of a soldier near the battle lines hasn't much ceremony, I am told, and surely doesn't include flowers."

The boys slept that night in the open, with the saddle for a pillow. They were awakened just before dawn by the restless antics of Bon Ami ("Good Friend")—for so Henri had named the horse. The animal snorted and tugged at the tether as if scenting some invisible approach through the woods, at the edge of which the three had been passing the night.

Billy and Henri were on their feet in an instant, rubbing their eyes and trying to locate by sight or sound among the trees or elsewhere in the shadowy landscape the cause of Bon Ami's disturbed action.

Even if the boys had suddenly made up their minds to run to cover, they would not have had time to go very far, for in the instant a scout troop rode out of the woods and straight at them.

The cavalymen spread in fan shape, and in a moment Billy, Henri and Bon Ami were completely surrounded.

In good but gruff English the ranking officer of the troop commanded: "Come here and give an account of yourselves."

Billy and Henri made haste to obey, and look-

ing up at the officer on horseback offered their smartest imitation of a military salute. Peering down at them the cavalryman exclaimed:

"So help me, they're mere boys. Who let you out, my fine kiddies, at this top of the morning? Here, Ned," calling to one of the nearest troopers, "bring the hot milk and the porridge."

Billy was becoming slightly nettled at this banter. He had no desire to be taken seriously, but yet not quite so lightly.

"I am an American citizen, sir, traveling, with my friend, on personal business."

"Will you listen at that now?" laughed the cavalryman whom the first officer had called "Ned."

"Do you know or have you thought that 'personal business' is just now rather a drug on the market in these parts?"

The chief was again addressing the boys, or, rather, Billy, who had elected himself spokesman.

"It does appear that the soldiers have the right of way here," admitted Billy, "but we came in such a hurry that we couldn't stop to inquire in particular about the rules."

"That's a pretty good horse you have." It was light enough now for the officer to take in the fine points of Bon Ami. "Where did you get him?"

Billy explained the circumstances.

"Well, you are plucky ones," commented the officer. "Now," he continued, assuming again the

tone of command, "saddle your steed and fall in."

The troop wheeled back toward the north and the boys rode stirrup to stirrup with the bluff captain.

At the noon hour the riders reached the field working quarters of the British commander. A small headquarters guard lounged on the grass around the farmhouse that sheltered the general and his staff, a dozen automobiles and motorcycles were at hand and grooms were leading about the chargers of the officers.

The scout troop halted at a respectful distance and dismounted.

"Put on your best manners," suggested the troop captain as he preceded the boys in quickstep to headquarters.

After a brief conference with an orderly, the boys were ushered into the presence of several officers in fatigue uniform seated at a table littered with papers. At the head of the table was a ruddy-faced man, clean-shaven, with iron-gray hair, to whom all heads bent in deference.

"We have visitors, I see." The general's tone and manner were kindly.

The boys stood speechless, their eyes fixed upon the little Maltese badge of honor suspended from the left breast of the general's coat by a crimson ribbon. It was the Victoria Cross!

CHAPTER XII.

WITH THE BRITISH ARMY.

"Now, my young men," said the general, speaking briskly and to the point, "what are you doing here, where are you going, and is there anything else you wish to say?"

As Billy had not as yet opened his mouth, he thought the general was rather ahead of his questions in the last quoted particular.

"Allow me, general, to introduce Mr. Trouville, a native of France, who only lacks the years to vote in America. He has the desire, I assure you. As for myself, I am William Thomas Barry of Maine, United States of America, known as Billy—and together we are known as the Aviator Boys. We are in the flying trade, and with your kind permission we would like to fly now."

The officers observed the boys with new interest. The *London Times* had some months ago printed the experiences of a prominent English visitor to America, who had seen these young aërialists in some of their sky-scraping exhibits, and had even taken a short flight with Billy.

"We military fellows are all great for aviation—it's a big card in this war game"—this observation from the member of staff seated nearest the gen-

eral—a thoroughbred sort of man who also wore the badge of valor. "And more than that," he added, "I have a boy of my own in the flying corps of the army."

It occurred to Billy that this officer might care to hear the sad story of the death flight of the British youth that they had witnessed on the shores of the North Sea.

Billy, in real dramatic style, described the thrilling incident. There was no lack of attention on the part of his listeners; especially did the man who looked like a thoroughbred seem lost to everything else but the tale the boy was so earnestly telling. When Billy produced from the inside pocket of his blouse the photograph and ring that he had taken from the heart pocket and finger of the dead aviator there was strained silence, first broken by the man who had been most intent as a listener.

"It was my boy, my own son!"

This man who had faced shot and shell with never a tremor on many a blackened battlefield, and had won the magic initials "V. C." after his name, bowed his head in grief and not ashamed of the sob in his throat.

"Some day, God willing," he softly said to Billy, "you shall guide his mother and me to that resting place."

A bugle call outside aroused the officers to the

grim business of the hour. The roar of another battle would soon be on.

The general turned the boys over to the care of a veteran soldier, a sergeant, with strict orders that they should not be allowed to leave the rear of the brigade about to advance.

Billy and Henri, however, had the opportunity of observing during their first actual army experience, even though of the rear guard, the striking device of a French officer in order to steady his men, in an infantry regiment, called upon for the first time to face the discharge of German shells. For a moment the men hesitated, and even made a slight movement of withdrawal. Instantly the officer seemed to have taken in the situation. The boys heard him shout:

“Halt! Order arms!”

Then, quite coolly, he turned his back upon the enemy—for the first and last time—whipped out his camera, called upon his men not to move, and proceeded to take a leisurely snapshot of his company while shells were falling all around.

The men were astonished, but the officer's purpose was served. The company was steadied, and the boys, from the top of a supply wagon, watched them go gallantly to work. Sad to relate, the watchers also saw the gallant officer fall soon afterward, struck on the head by a fragment of shell.

“I tell you, General Sherman was right in what

he said about war." Billy was very positive in this expression of opinion.

On that day of fearful fighting the boys saw an entire German regiment perish in the rush of water which swept through the trenches after the Allies had destroyed the dikes; they saw hundreds of men and horses electrocuted on the heavily charged wire entanglements before the trenches.

At nightfall Billy and Henri, heartsick with the horror of it all, crawled under the wagon cover and fought nightmares through the long hours before another day.

It was raining in torrents when the boys peeped through the tear in the wagon shelter early the next morning, and it had turned sharply cold. The roar of the batteries had slackened for the time being, and it was a welcome moment for Billy and Henri, who on the day previous had heard more gunpowder racket than ever they did on all the Fourths of July they had ever known rolled into one.

Stepping out gingerly into the mud, the boys looked around for their friendly guardian, Sergeant Scott. He was nowhere to be seen among the few soldiers in khaki uniforms and woolen caps moving about among the wagons. They soon learned that the sergeant had made a capture during the night of one of the enemy's secret agents who had penetrated the lines for the purpose of cutting

telephone wires. The spy or sniper carried cutters and a rifle. From behind the lines with the rifle he had been shooting at men passing to and fro, but when he ventured inside with the cutters the sergeant nabbed him, though the invader was cleverly disguised in British outfit. Both captor and captive were up-field at an "interview," from which only the sergeant returned.

When he observed the boys shivering in their tracks, Sergeant Scott called to a teamster to fetch a blanket from one of the wagons. Borrowing a knife from the teamster, the sergeant slashed the big army blanket in two in the middle, doubled each fold and made two slits in the top.

"Jump into these, my Jackies," he ordered; "shove your arms through. Now you won't catch a frog in your lungs, and you're swell enough to make a bet on the races. Come along and tighten your belts with something in the way of rations."

The boys needed no second bidding, and their belts were very snug when they had finished.

"By the way," confided the sergeant, "Colonel Bainbridge has taken a heap of interest in you youngsters. His son, I heard, lost his life in one of those flying machines."

"Yes, we were the ones that told him about it. He's sure a grand man," added Billy.

"Well," continued the sergeant, "there are some of us going to work around toward Lille and the

River Lys region to assist in extension of the Allies' line there. If Colonel Bainbridge commands the movement, between 'you and I and the gatepost,' yours truly wants to go 'long.'

"So do we!" The boys spoke as one.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BOYS UNDER FIRE.

COLONEL BAINBRIDGE did command, and Sergeant Scott, Billy Barry and Henri Trouville went along.

"I wish they would let us ride Bon Ami."

Billy had noted the handsome horse they had captured prancing along carrying a heavyweight cavalryman, while Henri and himself were perched beside a teamster on the front seat of a supply wagon.

"Maybe they were afraid that you would run away," drawled the teamster. "Sergeant Scott says you're too skittish to turn loose."

"The sergeant will be putting handcuffs on us next," laughed Billy.

The teamster set his teeth in a plug of tobacco, snapped the whiplash over the big bay team and with a twinkle in his eye started the verse of some soldier ditty:

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“Said Colonel Malone to the sergeant bold,
These are the traps I give you to hold,
If they are gone when I come back
You’re just the boy I’ll put on the rack.”

“That’s just it,” added the teamster, changing from song to the usual drawl, “if the sergeant lets you come to harm the colonel would cut the stripes from his coat. And what’s more the sergeant is kind of struck on you himself. Git-ap,”—to the horses.

It was at the crossing of the Lys at Warneton that the boys had another baptism of fire.

The crossing was strongly held by the Germans with a barricade loopholed at the bottom to enable the men to fire while lying down. The Allies’ cavalry, with the artillery, blew the barricade to pieces and scattered the defenders.

In the square of the town the boys saw the greatest display of fireworks that ever dazzled their young eyes.

One of the buildings appeared to leap skyward. A sheet of flame and a shower of star shells at the same time made the place as light as day.

Out of the surrounding houses the Germans poured a terrific fire from rifles and machine guns.

The Allies’ cavalry got away with a loss of eight or nine men, and Sergeant Scott headed volunteers

that went back and carried away wounded comrades from this dreadful place.

Billy and Henri rushed at the sergeant when he returned from this daring performance and joined hands in a sort of war dance around their hero.

"The Victoria Cross for yours, old top!" cried Billy.

"You ought to have it this minute!" echoed Henri.

"Quit your jabber, you chatterboxes," said the big sergeant playfully, shaking his fist at his admirers, but it could be plainly seen that he was mightily pleased with the demonstration.

"You and I will have to do something to keep up with this man," remarked Billy to Henri, with a mock bow to the sergeant.

"None of that," growled the sergeant, "your skylarking doesn't go on the ground, and not on this ground, anyhow."

But the boys had grown tired of being just in the picture and not in its making.

"The sergeant doesn't seem to think that we have ever crossed a danger line the way he coddles us." Billy was ready for argument on this point.

"Wish we had him up in the air a little while," said Henri, "he wouldn't be so quick to dictate."

It was in this mood, during the advance and on the night of the next day, that the boys eluded

the vigilant eye of the sergeant long enough to attempt a look around on their own account.

In the dark they stumbled on the German trenches.

Billy grasped Henri's arm and they turned and made for the British lines, as fast as their legs could carry them, but the fire directed at them was so heavy that they had to throw themselves on the ground and crawl.

There was no cover at hand, and the chances looked mighty desperate for the pair, when Billy saw, close by, an enormous hole in the ground, made by the explosion of a "black maria," the name given by the soldiers to the projectiles of the big German howitzers.

Into this the boys scrambled, panting and scared to the limit.

"Wouldn't this jar you?"

Henri had no answer to Billy's quickfire query. He didn't think it required any just then. He was "jarred," in the way the word was used.

"It's a pretty pickle we're in," Henri managed to say when a shell screamed over the hole.

"It sure is," admitted Billy, as a round-shot scattered dust particles and showered them into the hiding place.

"'We won't go home till morning,'" this warble by Henri, a rather feeble attempt to be gay.

"Maybe you won't go home at all," was the gloomy expression of opinion by Billy.

"I wonder if the sergeant has missed us yet?" Henri was wondering.

The ground was shaking and then a sound as though the earth was being hammered with ten thousand clubs in as many giant hands.

In the early dawn the Allies were charging the German entrenchments.

The howitzers thundered; battle cries and commands resounded.

The Allies' forces whirled by and on both sides of the underground shelter where the boys were crouching.

With the clash of arms behind them Billy and Henri clambered out of the hole and spurted for dear life and safety.

When the troopers came back from the fight, the sergeant, with heavy stride, came to the wagon into which the boys had crawled.

"Come out of there," he commanded.

The boys instantly obeyed and in sheepish manner presented themselves to the severely erect soldier.

"You'll be buried without the benefit of a preacher if you try another trick like that." This was all the sergeant said, but he looked daggers.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN AN ARMORED MOTOR CAR.

ON the way to Arras the boys had their first experience aboard an armored motor car, equipped with machine guns. Quite a promotion from the teamster's seat of a supply wagon!

How the sergeant ever consented to let his charges join the crew of Belgians operating the war machine is not known. Perhaps he was not told until it was too late to object.

But there they were, Billy and Henri, as large as life, out "Uhlen hunting," as the soldiers put it. The boys knew that a Uhlan was a kind of light cavalry, or lancer, in the German army, and they had heard that he was "game," but never before in the sense of game to be hunted.

As for that, hardly a day passed but the boys learned something new from the soldiers.

But a short time before at La Basse they had seen one of these armored cars return from a dash ahead of the main body loaded with spoils in the shape of lancer caps, busbies, helmets, lances, rifles, and other trophies, which the crew distributed as souvenirs to a crowd in the market place.

The next day one of the cars that went out never

came back. The Uhlans probably took it for a trophy.

Whenever you see a splendid piece of tapestry or hangings displayed in a window, museum, or house, you may think of Arras, the little old town on the right bank of the narrow little river Scarpe, right in the center of the line of battle between Lille and Amiens, and remember that our boys were now following that line in France.

From the armored car the boys in the distance saw that famous old belfry, said to be 240 feet high, rising gracefully above the town hall, and on top of which was a huge crown. A day later this tower was wrecked by a shell in furious bombardment.

During this journey in the armored car the boys were filled with admiration of the dash and skill displayed by the Belgian crew. They were also greatly interested in the hardy cyclists, who apparently without effort kept up with the pace of the big machine. In some of the villages through which they passed the inhabitants met the cyclists with kisses, in some of the roads the cyclists met barricades and machine guns.

"If a doctor told you that you needed change to help your health, Henri, you can write him that you're getting it."

Billy was finding this new war game very much to his liking.

"You'll have word from the doctor without writing," retorted Henri, "if you don't quit standing up in the car."

Even then bullets were whizzing past them. The car had suddenly come upon a small party of the German mounted troops, firing with short-arms from the saddle.

The Belgian gunners instantly responded from the car and swept the road.

"On to Arras!"

Billy made the grim soldiers smile with his enthusiasm.

When the car rolled into the quaint old town of Arras, the boys confessed that they had never seen quite the like of it before.

"There's a building that I'd like to move to Bangor," said Billy, pointing to the Hotel de Ville, one of the finest in France, with its Gothic façade rising upon seven arches of different sizes.

"There's a lot of rare old houses here, I tell you," asserted Henri, "but I never saw them until now, except on postcards. By the way, Billy, take a look at those and think of the days of Christopher Columbus."

Henri referred to the Petite place and the Grande place, curious relics of the long gone days of Spanish rule, with their queer gables and old arcades resting on curiously shaped sand-stone columns.

"This is the town, you know," advised Henri, "where Robespierre was born."

"Humph! This war has kicked up a bigger muss in France than 'Roby' ever did."

Billy was not inclined to concede that anything had ever created a stir ahead of that in which he was mixing.

The stir of the next day was, indeed, something to be remembered. Some of the biggest of the German guns were brought into action.

Billy and Henri had been napping, and never were naps more rudely disturbed.

Shells from the great guns used by the bombarding forces had a way of starting on their course with a minute-long shriek, which seemed to come from the shell itself. When the boys' eyes had been cleared from sleep they could not only plainly see the projectiles in the beginning of their flight, but also distinctly observe the bellying air rushing back to fill the vacancy left by the discharge and bounding and rebounding in a disturbed sea of gas.

"What a sight!" cried Billy when the first period of nervous strain had passed.

"Something fierce." Henri's comment was boy-like.

The boys were pacing in one of the antique streets with fragments of wood and chips of stone falling

about them when they heard a shout, followed down the avenue by the shouter. It was the sergeant rattling like a milk wagon with his military fixings.

"Hustle, you young bearcats; get to cover!"

With that the sergeant yanked each boy by the shoulder into a hospital building nearby.

"Here's help for you," said the sergeant to one of the Red Cross nurses. "Keep them busy, and," he added with especial emphasis, "inside."

That gentle nurse, a young English girl, the boys learned afterward, was struck by a shell and carried dying on a litter from a battlefield where she had been attending the wounded. Her name was Winnie Bell, and she rests in the cemetery at Le Mans, with the bodies of French and German soldiers around her, in whose service she gave up her noble young life.

The boys moved about with the nurse among the wounded, constantly growing in number.

"Oh! the pity of it all," she murmured, putting a cup of water to the quivering lips of a sufferer, a mere lad, wearing the brilliant uniform of a French trooper, with a gaping wound in his shoulder.

Henri, leaning forward to give the nurse a bandage from the packet he was carrying, caught sight of the soldier's upturned face.

"My brother Francois!" he moaned, dropping on his knees beside the litter.

The wounded soldier opened his eyes, and the agony of his hurt did not keep him from smiling.

CHAPTER XV.

FAREWELL TO FRANCOIS.

"You're feeling better now; I know you are; really, you must say that, Francois. I can't bear to see you lying there so still and so white."

Henri hovered about the cot of his wounded brother after the surgeon had dressed and bandaged the injured shoulder.

He had forgotten the war storm that raged outside, and even for the moment ceased to remember that his dearest chum, Billy, was ever at his elbow with ready sympathy.

"Tell me, Francois," Henri pleaded, "that you are going to get well."

"Of course he is," assured a mild voice from the foot of the cot, "but you must come away and give him a chance to sleep."

"Sleep! With all that roar outside?"

"Perhaps, my boy, the surgeon gave him something that would tend to quiet him. You must calm yourself, and remember that you have your duty with me. He did his duty without fear or ques-

tion. Are you less a man than your brother?"

The nurse well knew how to manage in a case of this kind. She had tested the metal of a proud young spirit, in the full belief that it would ring true.

"Come along now," she gently urged. "Let me show you that thought of self does not fit here."

They stood at the cot side of a mortally wounded Belgian soldier.

"We found a letter in his pocket," softly voiced the nurse, "saying that he was enclosing a pair of shoes for his three-year-old baby with the money he had earned as a scout in King Albert's army. Here are the little shoes," lying on the covering sheet.

Billy felt like he was choking, and Henri simply lifted the border of the nurse's apron to his lips.

It was several days before Henri obtained permission to talk with his brother. There was so much to talk about that the few minutes allowed were as so many seconds.

"But I've news from mother!" confided Henri to Billy—"she was all right when Francois last saw her in Paris, and she got the word I sent her about my going to the château, and why I was going. It was Francois who wrote me about the gold and jewels being left behind. Mother tried to get word to me not to take the risk; she said that more than all else she wanted me to come straight

to her if I could. It makes me ashamed to see Jules and Francois under the colors and I without, but I've made up my mind to do this thing I have set out to do, and I'll stick until it is finished."

"You can count me in to the finish, Buddy. You stick to the job and you can safely bet that I'll stick to you."

"Don't I know that, my truest of friends?"

Henri gave Billy a hand-squeeze that made that husky youngster wince.

Francois was rapidly regaining strength, his wound nicely healing, and, with the progress, his interest in Henri's mission to the Meuse was first in mind.

"In my letter," he said to Henri, "I feared to give details that might be read by other eyes than yours. You only would know even the name and location of our house by that letter. But I got it all right from mother about the secret hiding place of the fortune.

"Neither Jules, you, nor I had ever learned of the more than a century-old plan of the Château Trouville, handed down by a great-grandfather, which included an underground way from the hills through the valley and ending in the north wing of the château.

"Mother herself had almost forgotten that such a place was in existence until she recalled that some thirty years ago our father gave her what he jok-

ingly called a honeymoon trip through the tunnel, and she also recalled that it was a journey which she never repeated. She spoiled a new dress going through.

"Of course, you and I know that the old house itself is full of queer corners, walks between the walls, panel openings and all that; we played hide-and-seek there enough, but the outside passage we never struck. Father might have told us about it if he had lived."

"I suppose the tunnel came in handy when old times were squally," suggested Henri.

"Never handier, I think, than it may be to you if you ever get within a mile of what you are going after," replied Francois; "you will never get in by the front door the way things are now."

"Wish you would go along with Billy and me."

"Not I. I travel only under orders. I am a soldier. You are still your own master. Now, while you are here, ask nurse to hand you my coat, if there is anything left of it."

"Ah, thank you, nurse."

"Feel in the lining back of the breast pocket, Henri. That's it. Cut the seam, brother. There you are."

Henri held in his hand a thin roll of paper.

"Open it."

Henri did as directed and saw that it was a miniature map, lined with red ink.

With their heads together the brothers studied the outlines, Francois explaining that he made this copy from a section of the original parchment.

"Jules has a copy, too," continued Francois, "but he is in the same boat with me—he can't quit his post. As I said before, it's up to you and your friend to get the family treasure out of the château. If you can get near enough, this paper will show you the way to get in and out unseen, even if the house be full of soldiers."

Henri borrowed needle and thread from the nurse and sewed the paper inside the collar of his blouse.

A week later the sergeant informed the boys that marching orders had been given, and they were to move with a detachment to the southwest.

"Going our way, hurrah!"

Henri then remembered that this meant parting from his brother, and was less inclined to rejoice when this sad thought came to his mind.

Francois was seated near one of the low windows of the hospital building, enjoying the bright sunlight that shone through the open casement.

He had a smile in his eyes when he saw Henri, with knapsack on his back, approaching.

"I know it's good-by, brother," he said. "But take it easy, old boy. We'll have a grand reunion some day."

Henri lovingly clasped the free hand of the

young soldier, in silent farewell, bravely squared his shoulders and marched away to join Billy and the sergeant, waiting at the door.

A bugle sounded and the soldier column swung away from war-torn Arras.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VALLEY OF THE MEUSE.

FROM a hillside the boys looked upon and over the great battlefield where the German army was then trying to break through the line of barrier forts between Verdun and Toul and the opposing French forces.

In front lay the level valley of the Meuse, with the towns of St. Mihiel and Bannancour nestling upon the green landscape.

Beyond and behind the valley rose a tier of hills on which the French were then striving with all their might to hold an intrenched position.

Bursting shells were throwing up columns of white or black fog, and cloudlets of white smoke here and there showed where a position was under shrapnel fire.

The sergeant had presented the boys with a high-powered field glass, and to their delight they picked out an occasional *aéroplane* hovering over the lines.

"Look at that little snapper," cried Billy; "that's

a French wasp; it's smaller and lighter than our kind; they call it the 'peasant's terror.' Gee! Seventy-five miles an hour is nothing to that plane."

"The aviator is giving signals!"

Henri had his eyes glued to the glass.

"Looks like a hawk circling around a chick."

Billy was again taking his turn.

"He'd better climb quick."

Henri noted that some of the big mortars were trying for the airman, and he had learned that these mortars could throw a shell a mile or more in the air.

The aviator evidently was aware of the fact, too, for he went higher and higher, until the machine looked like a mere scratch in the sky.

The boys returned to the trenches with Rene Granger, a lad of eighteen, who had enlisted, he said, at Lorraine, and who had already won the rank of corporal in a French regiment.

The three were together when the colonel of Rene's regiment called for a volunteer to carry the orders of the staff to the different companies. The colonel did not conceal the fact that the mission was one of great danger. The young corporal stepped forward, and offered his service. He listened attentively to the colonel's instructions. Then with a quiet *c'est bien* (it is well), he started.

The boys saw him reach the first trench in safety and deliver his message.

The next stage of his journey was a dangerous one, for he had to pass over an open space of 300 yards, swept by the enemy's fire. He went down on his hands and knees and crawled, only lifting his head in order to see his way.

Within a few yards of the trenches a bullet struck him in the thigh. He crept behind a tree, hastily dressed the wound, then dragged himself to the trench, where he delivered his message to the commander.

They tried to stop him there, but the boy refused.

"I have given my word," he said.

There remained still two companies to visit. One of them was quite near, but the other was 600 yards away, far advanced in the zone of fire.

Rene began his terrible journey. At every few yards he was compelled to stop, so fierce was the suffering caused by his wound. Bullets whistled around him, and one pierced his kepi.

He was within twenty yards of safety when a shell burst in front of him and fragments struck him, inflicting a terrible wound. He lay unconscious, but he had been seen from the trenches and two ambulance men ran out, placed him on a stretcher, and carried him to their company.

Rene became conscious once more, called for the commanding officer, and almost with his last breath whispered the orders he had been given.

"Oh, that he could have lived!"

Henri could scarcely realize that their new-found friend, their cheery companion of the past few days, was cold in death. But they brought him back to his regiment, in scarred body, for honor.

"He kept his word," said the colonel, who turned away that none might see what a soldier must hide.

"There's a boy that was all gold; I am grateful for having known him, and better for it, too; he knew how to live and how to die."

This was Billy's brief but heartfelt tribute to the memory of their fallen comrade.

But our boys must push on to their goal, and though their story must be seamed and crossed by these woes of war, yet it is their story.

"Château Chantillon still stands, and there is Château Chambley, and there, yes, there, is Château Trouville—my home."

Henri was drawing the distance close with the powerful field glass, and talking over his shoulder to Billy.

"With a wall of steel around them," commented Billy.

"But we are going to get through it," was Henri's determined reply.

"Speed the day!"

Billy was ready for the effort. Besides, he had been thinking a good deal about Bangor in the last few days.

"If those old guns over there," said Henri,

"would only let us alone until we found the mouth of that tunnel it's a sure thing that we could be under the roof of the Trouvilles in less than two hours."

"Maybe the old map's no good."

Billy never had been much of a hand for ancient history.

"If it's all the same to you, we'll give it a test to-morrow night."

Henri did not take kindly to Billy's unbelief.

"If we can get away from the sergeant, I will be at your heels," announced Billy, and he meant every word of it.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE POINT OF ROCKS.

THE French and allied forces were located in a range of wooded hills running north and south along the east bank of the Meuse. They had fortified steeply terraced slopes with successive rows of trenches, permitting line above line of infantry to fire against an advancing enemy.

At the foot of the hillside is the village of Vignueilles, a little stone-built town that had been shot into ruins by artillery. A boy from this village, who had taken refuge with the soldiers on the high

ground, found a former playmate when he met Henri. This boy's father had once been employed as a gardener by the Trouvilles.

As Billy said, "they jabbered French until they made him tired."

The new friend had the given name of Joseph, but Henri called him "Reddy." Billy called him a "muff," because he could not understand half that the new boy said.

But Joseph, or Reddy, by any name was just now a tower of strength, even if the tower was only five feet three inches up from the ground.

As Leon, the little Belgian, served at Ypres, so Reddy was going to prove a big help in the adventure at hand.

He had chased rabbits into almost every hole in these hills, and in the woods he could travel even beyond the German frontier by as many different routes as he counted fingers on his hands.

Billy, Henri and Reddy were in close conference all day, so quiet, and so cautious, for the once, in their movements, that the sergeant wavered between suspicion and anxiety, the first because he thought his charges must be up to something, and the second for the reason that he feared they were going to be ill.

He might have imagined relief from anxiety by thinking the boys were tremendously hungry had

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he seen their frequent trips during the day to the places where provisions were stored.

Had he seen them, however, taking several small safety lanterns from the ammunition department, suspicion would have stood first in his mind.

"The tunnel begins at a point 500 yards directly west of Fort Les Paroches, and it is called 'point of rocks,' " Henri reading the notes and following with a pin point the lines of the little map that Francois had given him.

The mentioned fort had been silenced only the day before by German mortars, and its location was now marked by a huge mound of black, plowed up earth.

"That's only three miles from here."

Reddy was eager to show his knowledge of the neighborhood.

Henri passed Reddy's statements on to Billy in English.

" 'Bowlders laid in the form of a cross show the place of entrance,' " Henri continuing to read.

" 'Stone slab at foot of cross. Remove stone and find iron ring in oak cover. Lift cover and find stone steps.' "

"Seems simple enough if we had a derrick."

Billy was still doubtful.

"The only thing I fear," said Henri, paying no attention to Billy's pert remark, "is that with time

the markings may be wiped out by changes of earth formation, forest growth or the like."

"No," quickly advised Reddy, "if it's the place that I've seen there are still a lot of rocks there."

"I suppose you could find the place for us, couldn't you, Reddy?" asked Henri.

"Yes! Yes!"

Reddy was on his feet to furnish proof without further delay.

"We can get there through the ravine," he was in a hurry to add.

"When the sergeant goes to inspect the outposts, then, let's make the break."

Billy was catching the spirit of the occasion.

So it was while good Sergeant Scott was performing a military duty the boys shouldered their well filled knapsacks, and, with Reddy leading, in the dusk succeeded in eluding the sentry first in the way.

The cunning of Reddy as a woodsman was wonderfully shown by the manner in which he took to the brush and the way he avoided notice. It seemed hardly any time at all before the boys were silently picking their way, shadow-like, in the depths of the pitch-dark ravine.

They had heard no challenge until Billy planted his foot on a fallen twig, which cracked like a pistol shot.

"Who goes there?"

Sharp question, in French, from above.

Down went the boys flat on the ground, concealed by overhanging bushes.

The sentry repeated the challenge.

All as silent as the grave.

The boys scarcely breathed. They knew the guard was one of the allied forces, but yet they had no desire to take issue with him. Even if he only turned them back to quarters their chances of getting away again would be few and far between. The sergeant would see to that.

Some ten minutes passed. It seemed longer to the truants in the ravine.

Then, as if satisfied that the noise was without menace, the sentry resumed his pace, and the boys flitted on as if shod with velvet.

The path took an upward turn, and Reddy nudged his companions to a halt.

"We're there," he whispered.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE MOUTH OF THE TUNNEL.

"WE'RE on some good old fighting ground," remarked Henri, who was well versed in history relating to the country around Château Trouville. "The Roman legions held forth here centuries ago."

"They would not have 'held forth' any great while under that German fire the other day."

Billy was not far wrong on that proposition.

The boys were doing this talking while Reddy was lighting the lanterns. These lanterns were bull's-eyes, and could be turned dark in an instant.

There was no shelling of this spot that night, for there was not enough of the fort left to make a target, and the trenches were attracting all the fire.

The boys could proceed with their work with some degree of safety.

Reddy painfully located the rocky point by falling over a big stone in the dark, the boys having decided to go it blind until they actually had to use the lights.

"You haven't broken a leg, have you, Reddy?" Henri anxiously inquired.

"No, I guess not," was Reddy's reply, "but I think I've kicked a toe loose, anyhow."

The boys switched the masks off their lanterns and three slender bars of light danced among the stones.

"Don't see any cross."

"Be patient, Billy," urged Henri, "we haven't been here five minutes yet."

For the next hour the boys circled around the place without finding a trace of the markings described in the map.

Billy and Henri sat down to rest, but Reddy, who seemed never to tire, continued to explore on his own account. He walked over to the ruins of the fort, and began to measure, by taking long steps, on a line some distance from the point where the boys had been searching for the cross.

Suddenly Reddy stopped. Billy and Henri could see that the ball of light in his lantern had quit moving.

"Wonder if he has found anything?" Henri jumped at the prospect.

"Nothing like going to see," and Billy with the words was off like a shot.

Sure enough, Reddy had struck a warm trail. All of the cross was not under his feet, but there was sufficient outline to show sections of the original design. Some of the stones had shifted away, but there, beyond doubt, was that for which the boys were looking.

The lantern rays were all directed to the foot of the outline, that is, the end of the longest row of boulders.

The directions had read: "Stone slab at foot of cross."

The boys bent to their knees and with faces close to the earth.

"There's a corner of it!"

Reddy was making all the discoveries.

Billy and Henri commenced clawing the dirt like

hungry chickens. Reddy stood up and used his feet to better advantage. This combined effort was rewarded by a clear view of the slab.

It was there, and Billy could not now deny it.

"Remove stone and find iron ring in oak cover."

But how were the boys to "remove" that stone? Reddy had a lightning thought. All his thoughts came that way.

Away he went, chasing the lantern ray ahead of him. In that heap of crumpled earth and stone, lately Fort Les Paroches, there was surely something in the way of iron or steel out of which to make a stone lifter.

Reddy was back in a few minutes dragging not only one but two steel bars which had been knocked like nine-pins from their fastenings.

"Here's levers for you," he announced gleefully.

Billy saw what he had, even if he did not understand what he said.

Henri and Billy with the bar-points punched holes at the side of the slab and got a purchase. Then they pried with all their strength. At first the slab did not budge an inch.

Reddy added his weight to one of the bars and the slab was loosened in its setting.

"Now another heave!" panted Billy.

"Up she comes!" said Henri.

The slab was lifted high enough to give a chance for shoulder pressure, and the rest was easy, for

when once out of its setting the stone had no great weight.

The lanterns revealed the fact that the workers had been rightly directed up to the minute.

The oak cover was there, and also the iron ring. Through this ring the boys shoved the bars and pulled the cover away from the opening.

The stone steps were there; somewhat crumbly, but there. The directions were verified to the finish.

"Don't rush in there until you give the fresh air a chance to go first."

Reddy knew a lot of things that he had never learned from books.

But now it was Henri who was getting impatient.

"It ought not to take long for the tunnel to clear, and, what's more, we are going to get out of sight before daylight."

Daylight was rapidly approaching.

CHAPTER XIX.

THROUGH THE SECRET PASSAGE.

"It's me first this time," declared Henri. "I'm on the way home, and it's the duty of this son of my mother to open the door for our guests."

"You bluffer, you," said Billy, "what you want is to take the first risk of going into that hole. I know you."

Henri did not stop to argue. He cat-footed it down the stone steps, holding his lantern in front of him at arm's length.

Billy came next, and Reddy last. The last boy, however, was not the least when it came to thinking. He thought that it would be a good idea to fix the oak cover so that he could support it with his hands and let it drop again over the opening when the three should have gone underground.

It would give a chance prowler no opportunity to find the mouth of the tunnel, and either follow them or set up an alarm that would result in the boys being caught like rats in a trap.

So Reddy wisely closed the way behind them, and thus insured that there would be no disturbance from the rear.

The tunnel route was not an inviting one. The rounded roof in many places had sagged and closed in to such an extent as to almost choke the passage, and great care had to be taken by the boys so as not to bring a mass of stonework and earth down upon their heads. This dangerous condition was chiefly where the tunnel ran through the low ground, for when the passageway began to ascend the boys were enabled to go much faster and in greater safety.

But in the tunnel entire the air was stifling and from the cracks in the slimy walls came hideous crawling things.

It was fully an hour before the boys had any assurance that the tunnel really did have an end.

This assurance was a heavily grated door set in solid masonry.

"Now we are done," was Billy's despairing prediction.

"Never say quit; that isn't like you."

It was seldom that Henri assumed the rôle of bracer-up to Billy. It had been generally the other way, but Billy was willing to acknowledge that he was not much of a cave man. He liked the open too well.

There were faint streaks of daylight threading through the grated spaces of the door. That was something for which to be thankful.

Reddy was giving the rusty grating a lively shake when with a clang something hit the stone floor of the tunnel.

It was a key of the kind that locksmiths used to make by the pound.

The key had been suspended from a hook at the side of the door, and Reddy's vigorous attack on the grating had caused it to fall.

Henri pushed the key into the ponderous lock and with a strong-arm twist succeeded in making it turn. The rusty bolt screeched as it was drawn

back, but the door could be opened, and it was opened by the main pulling strength of three husky youngsters.

Just on the other side of the door was the rounded base of a tower, and, looking upward, the sky could be seen through many openings in the stonework.

There were four doors in this circular room, the one by which the boys had just entered, and the other three in a row, close together, directly opposite the tunnel entrance.

"This," explained Henri, "is 'Old Round Tower,' far more ancient than the château itself, and one of the landmarks along the Meuse. I never cared much for it myself as a play place; it was too gloomy, and rats used to swarm here. I remember of seeing this door to the tunnel, but always thought it led to some cellar, and cellars are no novelties on these grounds. I don't know how many casks of wine are underground about here, but there used to be a big lot.

"This door," Henri was pointing to the middle one in the row, "opens on a passage that runs back of the state dining-hall of the château, and ends at a panel on the right of the most beautifully decorated fireplace you ever saw.

"The passages behind the other doors run to the upper floors of the north and south wings of the house.

"There are side connections to them all in the old part of the château. Of course, in the east and west wings, added years later, there are no secret passages nor sliding panels."

"Which one leads to where the gold and jewels are kept?"

"I'll show you in a little while, Billy."

Henri pushed open the middle door of the row, and the boys had a whiff of musty tapestry and other shut-in odors which indicated that the passage had not been traveled for many a day.

Through the narrow way between the walls the boys walked, single file, leaving tracks in the dust and with many a sneeze and gasp.

At a point where the passage widened, Henri stopped and lifted a finger.

On the other side of the walls there was a sound of many voices, an occasional peal of laughter, the clink of glass against glass, and every now and then merry snatches of song.

Henri felt along the side of the passage until his fingers touched a little knob about level with his eyes.

With a slight pressure on the knob a panel on the other side was controlled and began to slide noiselessly in polished grooves to the left.

Henri held the movement to an inch.

"Cast your eye in there," speaking softly to Billy.

CHAPTER XX.

BEHIND CHÂTEAU PANELS.

THE state dining-hall of the château was serving as the breakfast room of a French general and his numerous staff. If the uniforms worn had not indicated to what nation these soldiers belonged, the proof was surely in the fact that they jested and sang before breakfast. It takes a gay lot to be jolly before breakfast. After dinner anybody might have the notion to be merry.

How Château Trouville had escaped destruction by the big guns of the Germans might be accounted for by the fact that the aforesaid big guns had been mostly employed, when not turned loose on the trenches, in silencing French barrier forts. As a German battery lieutenant remarked, "only forts really counted."

However it was, this fine French country house had not even been scratched, as yet.

The chatter in the dining-hall was all Greek to Billy, though Henri and Reddy appeared to be much interested and amused by the lively conversation.

Reddy pointed out here and there a *chasseur* that he knew by name.

"What's the matter with us having a little

breakfast ourselves?" suggested Henri. There was plenty to eat in the knapsacks.

Billy and Reddy had no protest to make on this proposition, but they found it thirsty work to swallow camp rations without even a sup of liquid.

It so happened that a foot soldier serving as waiter passed close to the wall, carrying a flagon filled with water. At the moment everybody in the hall stood up in attitude of salute. The general was just coming in to breakfast. The soldier set the flagon down near the panel; Henri pressed the knob, making the opening wide enough for Reddy to poke an arm through, and quick as a flash that expert young gentleman yanked the prize through the crack, which was instantly closed by Henri.

The boys could not see what the soldier did when he discovered his loss, but they imagined that he must have been considerably surprised by the mysterious disappearance of the flagon.

The boys had not had a wink of sleep for more than twenty-four hours, and with all their walking and the heavy work they had done at "point of rocks" they were completely fagged.

"Oh, for a good soft place on which to stretch, and some air that is decent to breathe," murmured Billy with nodding head.

"The surest thing I know," was Henri's en-

couraging words to the sleepy-head. "Come on, fellows."

Further up the passage Henri pressed another knob in the wall, and the opening immediately created let in a veritable blaze of sunlight.

It was a small, narrow room on the other side of this panel, but spangled with mullioned or barred windows.

Off this room was another apartment, longer but no wider than the first. In this latter chamber stood a gilded bedstead under canopy.

"Here," said Henri, "royalty was once upon a time concealed, when it was good for his princely health to be hidden."

Billy was more intent on the project of testing the bed than listening to legends. He mussed up the rich covering to his liking and rolled like a log, clothes and all, into the broad expanse under the canopy. Henri and Reddy with no more ceremony followed suit, and the three went after the record of the famous Seven Sleepers.

It was early afternoon when a tremendous clatter of iron-shod hoofs in the stone courtyard far below roused Reddy, who always slept with one ear open.

With no effort to select a favorite, Reddy applied spansks right and left to his snoring companions.

"Who hit me?" demanded Billy in a dream voice.

"Where's the trouble?" Henri was probing the covers in his haste to reach the inside works of an imaginary *aéroplane* motor.

Reddy dragged Henri out of bed by the heels, and in watching the wrestling match that followed Billy lost the desire to turn over for just one more nap.

"You fellows will insult the memory of his royal nibs if you don't quit," he growled.

"There's evidently something doing below."

Henri had shaken off the wiry Reddy and climbed upon one of the window ledges.

It was a cavalry movement, evidently, from the noise, and movement that indicated hurry orders.

"Perhaps the general won't be back for dinner."

The good sleep had put Billy back in his usual good humor.

"I don't know what's up," admitted Henri, "but whatever it is I'm thinking that it's time for us to get into action before the fighters go to pulling ears in this vicinity."

"In other words," said Billy, "it's time for us to pull up the treasure and pull out."

"That's the ticket."

Henri adjusted his knapsack, setting example for his comrades to get in marching order.

Passing out of the royal bed-chamber, the boys hastened again into the main passageway, going

further north than they had yet been in their flittings through the concealed walks.

Henri finally stopped over a big brass plate set in the floor.

"It is not like moving that slab last night," he commented, as the plate dropped with a snap on easy hinges by some combination which Henri well knew how to work.

A spiral staircase was revealed, and round and round and ever downward the boys proceeded.

At the foot of the staircase, at the end of a short passage, the trio were confronted by what was apparently a blank wall.

Henri counted to himself as he passed his hands over the face of the wall. When satisfied that his calculations were correct he called to Billy to give him a lift. Billy promptly furnished a pair of square shoulders, upon which Henri stood, after removing his shoes.

Henri tapped smartly at a selected spot, a hidden spring was released and a section of the wall fell away.

Once astride of the cross-piece upon which the moving section had rested, Henri lent Billy a helping hand, and Billy in turn gave Reddy, the lightweight, a stocky leg on which to climb.

The boys then dropped down on the other side.

They were in the treasure house of the Trouvilles!

CHAPTER XXI.

HENRI FINDS THE KEY.

THE treasure house was a gloomy den of a place, one small, heavily grated window, with dusty diamond-shaped panes, set high and deeply in the wall, like a porthole, being the only means of producing light from the outside, and even that outside a dark little court enclosed by frowning walls.

In possession of the safety lanterns, the boys could be considered lucky, not only to enable them to quickly complete the task before them, but the three fire-balls helped wonderfully in relieving the impression of being locked up in a tomb.

In a far corner of this dungeon was an iron-bound, oaken box of considerable size, fastened by a heavy padlock. The discovery of the lock presented the first difficulty not described in the paper which Francois had given Henri.

Billy rattled the lock by a vicious jab with the heel of his shoe, but the effect on link and staple availed about as much as a feather in a gale. Nothing short of dynamite, or the right key, could pass that massive guard.

"Did you think of this?" Billy's query deserved top line in the useless question column.

"If I had do you suppose I would be standing here like a hungry man before a baker's window?"

Henri was completely bowled over, as the saying is, by this hitch in his plans, at the eleventh hour.

Reddy had just completed an unsuccessful assault on the obstinate padlock when Henri astonished his friends by doing some tango steps, setting a lively tune by snapping his fingers.

"Got it, now!" he exclaimed between shuffles. "Keep on your coats, fellows, I'll be back in no time."

With that the son of the Trouvilles jumped for the cross-piece in the movable wall section, drew himself up with the agility of a monkey and with equal celerity landed in the passage on the other side of the wall.

The minutes ticked away in Billy's watch—ten—fifteen—twenty.

No sign of Henri.

"I can't stand this much longer," muttered Billy, never taking his eyes from the hole in the wall through which Henri had disappeared.

Reddy tried to tell Billy in French that he would go and hunt for Henri if he (Billy) would not mind.

Billy did mind. He understood Reddy's gestures if he did not fully comprehend the language.

"When anybody goes it will be a procession, with me in the lead."

He had hardly got this positive assertion out of his mouth when he heard something scraping in the passage, followed by the living picture of Henri framed in the opening above. Then the familiar voice:

"It's all right, Buddy."

"Just when I was thinking it was all wrong."

Billy lifted his hands to ease Henri's drop from the cross-piece, and gave him a bear hug when he landed.

Henri rapidly gave the reasons for his delay in getting back.

"You see, a flash of memory brought to my mind that mother kept the keys to about everything hanging behind a portrait of father in her bedroom. I had to go on the other side of the panel to get there—it's in the new part of the house, you know.

"I did not see anybody about when I went through the fireplace into the dining-hall. You can wager, though, that I did not lose any time in dodging through the door to the corridor that would take me quickest to the place for which I was bound.

"I got there, all right; found the keys"—holding up the jingling bunch dangling from a wire hoop—"and was making my grand get-away on the return trip. As a matter of caution I peeped through

the door of the dining-hall before I opened it very far. Lo and behold our friend from whom Reddy pilfered the flagon had seated himself at a table facing the door, through the crack of which I was straining my eyes.

"This fellow had a bottle of wine at his elbow, and a glass in his hand. He had settled for a good time, and I had settled for an uneasy one.

"Directly he arose and walked slowly toward the fireplace and curiously inspected it. Still wondering about that missing flagon, I guess. Then he continued his stroll to the window at the far end of the hall.

"‘This is the chance for me,’ I thought, and I bolted for the panel. What if it stuck or wouldn’t work? Believe me, it was a scary moment. Click, and I was through. I don’t know whether ‘red trousers’ saw me or just heard the click of the panel spring. At any rate, I stopped to listen a moment, and I heard him tapping here and there on the oak around the fireplace. That fellow is sure a suspicious customer.

"Well, here I am, and don’t let us waste any more time with this talkfest. Turn your lantern on the padlock, Reddy."

Henri knelt before the treasure box, holding the jingling bunch of keys between his eyes and the blaze of Reddy’s lantern.

"That looks like it would fit," selecting a short key of heavy turn.

"But it don't."

Henri made another selection, with no better success.

"Try that one," Reddy pointing to a rusty instrument in the bunch.

Reddy had hit the nail on the head.

That key turned, and the padlock tumbled into Henri's hand.

Then he lifted the lid of the treasure chest!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FORTUNE OF THE TROUVILLES.

As the fire-balls flashed upon many velvet-lined trays displayed by the lifting of the lid, all the colors of the rainbow seemed to combine in the dazzling surface—the white glitter of diamonds, the violet-purple of amethysts, the blue of the sapphire, the crimson of the ruby, the deep rich green of the emerald, the changing tints of the opal—a very pool of gems shimmering under the eager gaze of the three boys.

"Carry me out of fairyland," was Billy's break of the silence that followed the first look into the chest.

Reddy was all eyes and no tongue, but Henri had to say something in his rôle of showman:

"Some rare stones there, eh? Many years' gathering, too. This," picking up a gold-threaded bracelet of diamonds and amethysts, "is said to have been a later gift to the house from the royal gentleman that beat us to the bed upstairs. Whole lot of history here," lifting a handful of jewels and letting them fall again into their glittering bed, "but we'll keep all that for the campfire, if we ever get back to it.

"Here's some hard cash, by the way," moving a jewel tray and pulling out a buckskin bag. "I am afraid," added Henri regretfully, "that we can't carry a whole lot of this in a single trip where we have to travel light."

"We can make a noble try at it," stoutly maintained Billy, who did not relish the idea of leaving anything in the chest.

Henri jerked loose the cord that closed the mouth of the bag and let the gold coins fall in a shining heap on the floor—a mixed collection of franc pieces of various values, of French minting; English sovereigns and the German mark.

This shower could have been repeated many times, for under the trays were long rows of the same kind of buckskin bags, with contents alike.

"Wish we had a tray."

Billy realized that they had found more than they could carry.

"We will load first with the stones from the trays," proposed Henri. "And then add all the cash we can."

The boys proceeded to empty their knapsacks of the remains of the rations they carried, and by way of proper economy seated themselves on the stone floor for the purpose of stowing all the food they could inside them.

"I won't be hungry again for a week, I'm sure," asserted Billy, shaking the crumbs from his blouse.

"Then let's to business," briskly remarked Henri, as he engaged in the pleasing pastime of stuffing diamond ornaments into his knapsack. Billy and Reddy followed the leader in the jewel harvest, and all three of the knapsacks were soon filled to capacity and the straps carefully buckled.

That left only pockets, jacket lining and such space as could be used between clothing and skin for the coins.

"Remember, fellows," advised Henri, "that we mustn't anchor ourselves, for there is some lively effort ahead of us."

Billy was compelled to acknowledge that he was loaded to the limit at that very moment, and Reddy certainly carried more weight in his clothes than he ever had before or ever did afterward.

Shutting down the lid of the chest with a bang,

covering again the considerable amount of gold that the boys were compelled to leave, Henri was about to announce departure. An afterthought, however, induced him to lift the lid a second time. He removed the key of the padlock from the hoop and tossed the rest of the keys into the chest. Again closing the lid, he snapped the padlock in place and slipped the key into the band of his cap.

"Now we're off."

"S-sh!"

Billy turned the dark slide in his lantern. Henri and Reddy followed the cue.

Somebody or something was moving in the passage on the other side of the wall.

That somebody or something suffered a bump of some sort or other—a sound like the overturning of a chair.

Then a muttered oath in French. The somebody or something was human, and French.

The boys backed up into the darkest corner of the treasure house.

The grated window cast only a dim light into the room, but that line streaked straight across into the opening in the wall directly opposite.

The head and shoulders of a man appeared in the opening!

Even in the half-light Henri recognized the soldier who had lost the flagon and the suspicious

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tapper on the oak around the fireplace in the dining-hall.

From that panel in the dining-hall to the treasure house Henri, in his haste, had neglected to close the other slides, and even the plate over the stairway behind him.

He had carried a light chair from one of the upper chambers so that he could get back into the treasure house without a boost. It was over this that the trailing chasseur had stumbled, and which also gave the red-trousered sleuth the very clue he needed as to the whereabouts of the mysterious party who had taken the flagon from under his very heels.

Here was a pretty howdy-do for the boys. A soldier, and no doubt an armed soldier, between them and the carrying out of their cherished project.

There was only way out of the sealed chamber, and that soldier was in it.

Could Reddy, the fox of the woods, suggest a trick that would win here?

CHAPTER XXIII.

TRAILED BY A CHASSEUR.

THE soldier was evidently figuring in his mind as to what would be the next move on his part.

Finding no sign of life in the place where he expected, no doubt, to lay a hand or an eye on the impertinent party that had stolen the flagon, the chasseur seemed to hesitate about dropping down into what must have appeared to him a dungeon, and risking the chance of a hidden enemy leaping upon him from some shadowy corner.

It apparently occurred to him that more light would clear the problem, for he drew himself up to a sitting position on the cross-piece, produced a match and scratched it across the sole of his shoe.

The tiny flicker did not give much satisfaction. The shadows were too deep for a little flame like that to penetrate them to any great distance.

The boys stood like statues, flat against the wall, on the same side, and some twenty feet from the opening where the soldier was wasting matches. The darkness hung about them like a pall.

It was one exciting moment when Billy had a sneeze coming on, and did not know whether or not he could conquer it. A sneeze just then would have settled the whole business.

But Billy did not sneeze; he nearly suffocated, though, by holding his cap so closely against his face.

The soldier had apparently exhausted his supply of matches, for the final scratch was accompanied by a grunt that sounded like *sacres allumettes*, blasted matches.

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With that he swung himself down into the passage on the other side of the opening.

Billy, after a few minutes' wait, made a move toward the opening.

Henri laid a restraining hand upon Billy's arm.

"Wait a bit," he whispered, "better let Reddy do his shadow act and find out where our friend in the red trousers has taken himself."

Reddy instantly shifted his heavily laden knapsack from his shoulders, removed his gold-filled jacket, kicked off his shoes, and edged his way along the wall on tiptoes.

Under the opening he stood in listening attitude for several minutes; then, taking advantage of the rough stonework of the inside wall, he climbed like a squirrel to the cross-piece.

Cautiously poking his head through the opening, Reddy had another look and listened for his fellow countryman in uniform.

The soldier was nowhere to be seen—and Reddy could view the short passage as far as the foot of the spiral staircase, where the light came down from the open plate above.

Reddy lowered himself into the passage and cat-footed to the staircase, winding his way upward, every nerve on edge, and he ready for any emergency.

The soldier was not in evidence yet, but Reddy could now trace the chasseur by the marks on the

dusty floor of the passage, for it was still light up here, though the sun, it could be seen through the panel opening in the royal bed chamber, was sinking, and evening was near.

With eyes to the floor and crouched like an Indian trailer, the boy noted that the chasseur had gone toward the panel opening into the dining-hall, at least the traces showed that the footmarks reversed themselves, retracing in the same direction. Reddy could distinguish the soldier's tracks from those which he and his companions had made that morning, because the legging strap under the man's shoes was clearly outlined in the dust.

Reddy, seeing that the coast was clear, for the time being, scooted back to where Henri and Billy were anxiously waiting and called them by name. Reddy's knapsack, jacket, and shoes fell about him in the passage, speedily followed by the two boys. Henri stood on the chair and closed the wall section, which settled back without leaving a seam or mark on the wall surface.

"I'll bet they won't find that hole unless they batter down the whole wall," was Henri's comment.

The boys lost no time in getting upstairs and into the main passage, and there paused to give Henri a moment to figure the next move.

It was suddenly made manifest that at least one

way was blocked, for loud voices rang out in the passage in the direction of the dining-hall.

The chasseur had gone for assistance to aid him in solving the puzzle that he had at first wanted to solve by himself.

Billy and Reddy thought that this time sure they were done for, but Henri was still in the reckoning. He was at home, and knew every crook and cranny in the maze of passages.

As the soldiers approached nearer and nearer, arguing in rapid-fire French as they came, Henri wheeled, slammed the bedroom panel into place, and hustling his companions into a run retreated up the passage to the north, stopping an instant to close the plate over the staircase.

"That fellow will have to do some tall explaining when he comes up with his crowd, for he won't be able to show all that he may claim to have seen; that is, for a while, anyway."

Henri was taking a positive dislike to the soldier who had proved such a bother at this critical period.

At the very end of the passage they were traversing arose a stained glass window of most exquisite design. On each side of the window the wainscoting was inlay work, model of ancient arts and crafts.

Henri used his hands on this surface as he would finger a checker or chess board. A large square swung open like a cupboard door and Henri mo-

tioned his comrades to pass through, and he, at their heels, closed the panel.

They stood in a narrow gallery, looking down into a chapel interior, most beautiful to behold. Hurrying along this gallery, the boys halted at a door heavily mounted with brass fittings. It was opened without effort and the boys found themselves at the head of another of those steep stairways, this one, however, running straight down—and a long way down.

It led to the crypt, or subterranean vault, under the chapel. Here the boys lighted their lanterns, at the suggestion of Henri. The latter shouldered a protruding stone in the wall of the cell and it gave way, disclosing of all the passages they had encountered in the house the most dismal and forbidding.

“Push in,” said Henri, “and we’re on the way to ‘Old Round Tower!’ ”

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

“GEE! But isn’t this a jolly place, if you don’t care what you say.”

A rat almost as big as a small rabbit had made a dash over Billy’s feet. He also had just dodged a bat that had flapped straight at his head.

"You're a good way underground, my boy," said Henri, "and I guess it's been many a day since anybody hit this trail. It is called 'Monk's Walk.' Jules, Francois and myself explored this passage one day when we didn't have anything else to do, but had no desire to do it more than once. Our old butler, he was ninety when he died, showed us how to get in here, and he had a long story to tell about a hair-raising happening here a century ago. But that's another thing that will keep for the campfire."

The journey through this rat and bat infested passage seemed an age in the making. The floor was damp and slippery and each of the boys had a fall, but, happily, without injury.

It was really less than half an hour that was consumed in going from the crypt of the chapel to the door opening into "Old Round Tower," but Billy declared that he was much older when he got there than when he started.

"'It's dead for sleep I am,' as Mike said," further declared the boy from Bangor, "and I'll bet it's past midnight this very minute. Twenty minutes of, anyhow," looking at his watch. "And hasn't this been a day and a half for full measure? Something doing every minute."

Reddy felt the same way, but there was no use telling Billy so, because Billy did not take kindly to the French language.

Henri himself, if the truth be known, was fighting to keep his eyes open.

So on the bottom floor of "Old Round Tower" the boys stretched themselves, and with knapsack pillows as hard as the floor itself they dozed into uneasy slumber, which lasted until the dawn of a new day.

The sleepers were startled by the roar of cannon. Not that the roar of cannon was unusual to these now veterans in the ways of war, but the booming seemed particularly close this morning, and in a locality that had, as stated before in this chronicle, heretofore escaped shelling.

"I thought that French general had gone to seek trouble when the whole push galloped away yesterday," was Billy's first after-waking remark.

"Pity they hadn't taken that dining-hall chasseur with them."

Henri in this moment of alarm, had a thought for the busybody who had tracked them from pillar to post a few hours ago.

A shell landed with tremendous explosion in the courtyard of the château; another, and another, until the whole place was shaken in every foundation, the air was aflame with the shrieking projectiles, and crash after crash made a din that was deafening.

"Us for the tunnel!" cried Henri, as a round-

shot clipped the side of the tower above them and sent down a hail of stone chips.

The boys got out from under that tower in a hurry, and fortunate for them that they did. Two or three minutes later the whole structure collapsed under the terrific impact of the shelling.

When the trio ran through the tunnel door, it was sealed behind them by tons of riven stone.

Pale to the lips and trembling as if with acute ague, the boys weakly stumbled down the tunnel's descending course.

The earth above and about them quaked and shivered as the storm of powder and lead raged outside.

The same powerful engines of destruction that had blasted and silenced the French barrier forts had been turned on the château and its surroundings. Such buildings were as paper before this cannonading.

The walls of the tunnel were holding as far as the boys had proceeded. But they had yet to traverse the line in low ground, where they had noted, in coming, the sagging roof and leaning walls, which even then had almost choked up the passage.

With these conditions made worse by the artillery shake-up, it would be a close call if the boys escaped burial alive. There was no way out at the rear.

A shut off ahead—and that would be the end.

But for the lanterns it is doubtful if the boys could have refrained from running wild, and dashing into obstructions without care or reason.

They at least did not have the added horror of total darkness with which to contend.

As the descent grew sharper so grew the nerve strain of the travelers.

They passed the first point of danger on hands and knees. Between the roof and the floor there was the scant margin of three feet.

At the next the barrier presented an even tighter squeeze.

Then a clearer way for ten or fifteen yards.

Here it was that the lantern shafts of light ahead showed in one appalling instant a shifting of earth; first dust, then clods and small stones.

The passage was closing in!

The boys stood for a second as if petrified in their tracks.

Pour vos vies, courez! (for your lives, run!)

Reddy's shrill voice broke the spell, and the three dashed for the fast closing aperture. Billy, in the lead, essayed to step aside and let the others get through first, but Henri countered the movement with a violent push against the back of his friend and a reach for Reddy's neck—the one boy he pushed through and the other he dragged, himself falling, full length, on his face, but safe on the other side of the death trap!

None too soon, for Henri's legs were powdered with the dust from the earth mass that had fallen in a lump just behind him!

"Glory be!"

Billy said it with more fervency than ever before.

"Glory be!"

He said it again with grateful heart.

They were on the gradual ascent, and finally rested under the slab that would let them out into the free air.

No matter what they might be called upon to face there—it would be in the open.

Glory be!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SERGEANT TO THE RESCUE.

"THERE's nothing to do but lie here until night-fall," said Henri. "A try for camp now would be almost a sure shot that we would be gobbled up. They're fighting all around us."

"Held up, you mean, don't you?"

Billy could see only one fate for walking jewelry shops.

Reddy was in favor of a night move. He favored darkness for this kind of adventure, except in tunnels. He told Henri that if given half a chance he (Reddy) could get them back to their friends

with the same ease that he had conducted the excursion to the mouth of the tunnel.

"Billy mustn't step on any sticks, though," he added with a twinkle in his eye.

Billy knew that his name had mixed in the conversation, but he was not sure just what the little Frenchman was joking about. Besides, he was too thirsty to care.

"My throat is as dry as a bone," he complained.

"I'm a little husky myself," admitted Henri, "and wouldn't mind spending a few franc pieces for a pitcher of lemonade"—jingling the gold in his pockets.

"That reminds me," he continued, "that I'm thinking that it would be a good plan to bury this stuff right where we are. There is no telling what kind of a chase we will have getting back to camp, and it would be rough luck to chance losing that for which we have risked so much."

"But that means another trip here," argued Billy, "and it's me for one with no wish to haunt this territory."

Reddy turned a torrent of French loose on Henri.

"He says," Henri translating to Billy, "that tonight he will take to the woods alone, reach Colonel Bainbridge and tell him of our troubles, and it may be that sufficient force could be sent to pull us lambkins and the treasure out of the hole."

"Bet the colonel will do it!"

Billy enthusiastically approved the scheme.

"Come to think of it, though," he amended, "if it isn't unfair to Reddy I think it is a great idea."

"Don't you worry about Reddy," assured Henri, "he is better off around here without us than we would be without him."

"Then the only thing on my mind now is one big drink of cold water." Billy drew a long breath at the thought.

But thirst and hunger the boys must endure for a while; they dared not risk all until actually forced to do so.

Billy looked at his watch at least twenty times that afternoon. He was not quite sure that it was right, for the little silver ticker had been badly dented during the struggle for life in the tunnel, but the works were still merrily moving, and so continued worthy of confidence.

The watch, on the twentieth inspection, showed seven o'clock. The time for Reddy's departure was drawing nigh.

No longer a rich prize for would-be captors, Reddy put himself in trim for swift and silent mission. His jewel-laden knapsack he laid aside. He shed gold, indeed, from every pore, and stood erect and smiling, as poor in purse as when he fled from his ruined home into the hills.

The watch ticked away another hour. Then Reddy was hoisted aloft on Billy's shoulders, and

turned the palms of his hands upward against the slab. A vigorous shove that almost cost Reddy his balance raised the stone and turned it to one side. Reddy did not fall backward, he leaped upward, dug his elbows into the earth, and wriggled out upon solid ground.

Pushing the slab back into place, and without another word, he bounded away in the darkness toward the familiar path in the ravine.

Nine—ten—eleven—midnight were counted by Billy's watch.

After that the two comrades ceased to mark time. They were too drowsy to mark anything.

They would not have attempted to resist a rat had one attacked them.

There was coming from the tier of hills, from the terraced slopes rising above the valley of the Meuse, armed aid, but of the good tidings there was yet no sign to the weary, hungry, thirsty boys in the far-off cave.

Reddy had gone straight as a homing pigeon to the army headquarters, had pleaded his way through every sentry post, and to the presence of Colonel Bainbridge.

The mainspring of the military machinery was quick to act, and it was a gallant array that the little red-headed Frenchman guided to the rescue of the treasure guards he had left in the tunnel.

There was yet a bayonet charge to be resisted

before the slab was lifted. There had been fierce combat, hand-to-hand, as well as artillery practice at Château Trouville. A company in gray had fallen back from the main body in the night in the direction of the ruined fort. The rescue party came as a surprise out of the ravine, and "point of rocks" was made the scene of a brief but desperate encounter. The German force, outnumbered, gave way.

Reddy, who had been viewing the clash from behind a screen of stones, jumped from the slab when danger had ceased to threaten, and in his excitement plumped down into the pit like a football.

Billy and Henri, now very much awake, were jointly seized by the hands, and Reddy, who had alighted flat-footed, pulled his comrades about in a sort of circular war dance.

This came to a sudden stop when a deep, commanding voice hurled these words downward:

"You kids come up and report!"

The speaker was Sergeant Scott.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ORDERS TO MOVE.

REDDY having resumed his share of the burden of precious stones and gold pieces, the three boys were given, in turn, the glad hand and a stout pull out of the pit. The sergeant tried his best to maintain a severe manner, but the effort proved a rank failure. The delight of the big trooper over the finding and assured safety of his young charges would not down. Even the natural and cultivated reserve of the Englishman was not proof against the affectionate regard he felt for the boys he had both fathered and mothered for these many days.

As the rescue party marched on either side of the sergeant, striving to match his long step, walked Billy and Henri, with Reddy close in the rear.

"You got me in a pretty mess with the colonel, you little rascals."

"Well, we just had to do it, Sergeant," answered Henri. "It's what we came for, and you can't blame us for not throwing away our last chance to win out. It was for sure our last chance, for Château Trouville is no more."

There was a note of sadness in the last sentence. It was of great sorrow to Henri that this beautiful home place had been reduced to a smoking ruin,

with its priceless works of art and all those heir-looms so dear to the hearts of the race of Trouville.

All that remained of the family fortune had been saved by Henri and his faithful boy friends at the risk of their lives.

Saved? Many a league to travel, before the treasure reached its fixed destination, many a slip to be avoided, many a sharp corner to be bravely turned.

"We thank you with all our hearts, sir."

The boys were greeting Colonel Bainbridge, and each was favored by that officer with a warm handshake.

"Away with you now," ordered the colonel. "Get food and rest. To-morrow I have new plans for you. Leave your knapsacks in yonder tent, over which a guard will be mounted."

The boys thought that no place had ever appeared so attractive as the field kitchen, with its soup boiler and its oven on wheels. And the cooks were more than kind. It was well known that the colonel had favored attention to his young friends.

Relieved of hunger and thirst the boys hunted up their old friend, the teamster, and he provided them with blankets and a comfortable nest under cover of a supply wagon.

The next morning the boys expected an after-breakfast summons from the colonel, but there was

no call for them from headquarters. Fierce fighting was going on in the valley town of St. Mihiel, on the right bank of the Meuse, and, in viewing the conflict from the hillside point, the boys were thrilled by a moving picture that would have commanded a fortune in the films.

The town on which the war plague had fallen is on the site of the ancient Abbey of St. Mihiel, and the tide of this day's battle surged about the noted Church of St. Mihiel, containing that fine statue of the Madonna, by the great artist, Richier, and also the choir stalls world-famed for their beauty.

Henri and Reddy took it as a personal grievance that these things should be threatened with destruction.

"I'll just tell you what," suddenly declared Billy, breaking a long silence on his part, "I'd like to be the aviator who makes the first flight across the Atlantic, and especially if I could start to-day from this side!"

"And leave me, Billy?"

Henri had applied the tonic that Billy needed.

"Not this day, or ever, Buddy. It was only this war business that set me dreaming of better days. On to Paris, old chum, you and I!"

Billy was himself again.

Turning back to camp, the boys were informed that the colonel had given the word that they were to report to him as soon as they could be found.

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"Something's up," predicted Billy, as they hurried to headquarters.

The colonel, when they arrived, was busy poring over an outspread map, and occasionally conferring with other officers grouped about him.

It was some time before the boys received attention, for evidently some issue of considerable moment was under discussion.

When the colonel finally expressed himself satisfied with the program outlined, he turned to his young friends and remarked:

"I presume that you will not object to my making a change of base, and," smiling, "I hope you will not deny me the honor of your company in the movement."

"Always at your command, colonel," gallantly responded Henri.

"Then," concluded the colonel, "you will be advised shortly of the hour of marching."

"What's to become of me?"

This was the anxious question that Reddy addressed to Henri as they left headquarters.

"You don't suppose that we're going to lose you this side of Paris, do you?" was Henri's prompt counter question.

"Paris!" joyfully echoed the boy. "Me? Let's hurry!"

Billy guessed that Reddy was glad.

"I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on the

way," hummed the boy from Bangor, as they hastened to tell the teamster the good news.

An hour later the sergeant came down to the wagon. As usual, he spoke to the point:

"Get your bundles, boys!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BOYS GO GUN HUNTING.

THE French had been massing their troops by forest paths, from Verdun and Toul, to throw them against the Germans in desperate endeavors to break the lines which protected the sites for the German heavy siege artillery and the Austrian automobile batteries of twelve-inch siege guns.

To join in this movement the command of Colonel Bainbridge was preparing.

For days the French aviators had repeatedly scrutinized every acre of land looking for a concealed battery of growlers, snugly hidden in a wood on the rolling heights of the Cote Lorraine. These aviators had failed to mark a find.

The conference that the boys had witnessed at headquarters, when summoned by Colonel Bainbridge, had to do with this battery problem. They had then heard mention of the doings and failure

of the flying corps, but further had not been taken into the confidence of the officers.

When the sergeant directed them to get their bundles, Billy and Henri began to hope that they might run into an opportunity to once again get near a flying-machine, if not into one.

"I'd like to get above ground once more, for sure I've had enough underground work lately to last me a lifetime."

The desire of Billy to do some lofty sailing was twin with the wish that haunted Henri.

"Let's volunteer to scout for that battery," urged the latter, aroused by his chum's suggestion.

"No use," was Billy's discouraging reply. "The colonel won't stand for it."

"But, maybe he would, after all," reasoned Henri, "if we put it up to him the right way. His own son was in that branch of the service."

"If you can convince the colonel, well and good."

Billy appeared to think that there was a conspiracy afloat to keep him tied fast to the ground.

"I'm going to make the try," said Henri, "as soon as we join the other force."

He did make the try next day, and finally persuaded the colonel that under the constant battery fire Billy and himself would be at least as safe in the air as on the march.

"Just think, colonel, what a chance for us to do something worth while, and do it the only way we

can. As soldiers we don't count. As aviators we're the lucky number."

When the French commander heard that one of our Aviator Boys had an idea that his eyes were better than those of the military flyers, he amusedly assented to the proposition, but only because of the fact that there was a shortage just then in the aviation corps—two of them only the day before having sailed in the way of a shell from one of the big mortars of the enemy.

"It's our job!"

This was the joyful announcement of Henri to his flying partner.

The next argument was with the sergeant, but he, too, was compelled to throw up his hands in surrender.

The French aviator who directed the corps told Henri that their detail was for "artillery reconnaissance."

When Henri translated the name of their job to Billy, the latter said that "gun hunting" would serve just as well, and it could be spoken in one breath. "I haven't enlisted on either side, mind you," added Billy. "I am just aching to fly—that's all."

The French outfit included a machine "built for two," and of a make with which the boys were familiar.

The only instructions given the amateur scouts related to the direction of the mysterious shelling

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point from which so much damage had been inflicted upon the Allies without an open chance to retaliate.

For the treasure the colonel had agreed to act as banker, and, as a balm to Reddy's wounded feelings, when he rebelled at separation from his friends, that youngster was assigned to duty as special messenger within the lines.

Again our Aviator Boys listened to the vibration of the aëroplane, the rattle, roar and hum of the motor, the music that soothes the nerves of every practiced airman.

The boys hit the high grade at 8,000 feet, and circled in huge ellipses between the allied troops and the positions hostile to them.

Henri had been given a powerful field glass, and he was faithfully using it in acute observation. The roar of the aërial travel was so loud in the quiet of the upper air that it drowned the occasional thunder of the big guns, which fire could be marked by sight if not by hearing.

A few moments of sweeping flight, and the young aviators were looking down on the wood mapped as suspicious.

They hovered about, while Henri worked the field glasses to the limit, but to no avail.

"Let her down a bit!" he yelled to Billy.

Billy cut the height a thousand feet or so.

Nothing but tree-tops was in sight.

"More yet!" shouted Henri.

Dangerously near now, if there was a hidden battery below.

Henri bent further over the frame of the machine, with the glasses aimed at a certain point, which had suddenly become of special interest to him. He had seen something that was not a tree-top.

The glasses revealed the location of the battery. The guns, two in this particular position, stood behind a screen of thickly branching trees, the muzzles pointing toward a round opening in this leafy roof. The crew as suddenly discovered their visitors, and instantly, as busy as bees, sprang to their posts.

"Turn her loose!" screamed Henri in Billy's ear, and Billy did "turn her loose," up and away.

The gunners were not quick enough to catch this winged target, but they burned a couple of large holes in the air in trying.

Billy drove the *aéroplane* into a protecting cloud that closed white and moist around them.

Twenty minutes later the excited flyers told their story to the colonel.

"That ride was a bully treat," declared Billy; "but really I'd like to have stopped in a chummy way with those fellows on the hill long enough to

see them work the guns. They're some hustlers with the big irons, I tell you."

"Next time you can send in your card," laughed Henri.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GOOD NEWS FROM DOVER.

THE bombardment of Rheims was in full blast, and here it was that the boys witnessed a strange combination of war and peace. Unaffected by the terrific shelling of the town, refugees from Northern France and Belgium were busy in the country picking grapes for the French champagne yield.

"Can you match that?"

Billy marveled at the scene presented.

Henri and Reddy were intently watching the flight of shells, some of which struck the cathedral, and a boy bugler, between 14 and 15 years old, who came out of the heat of the fray, told them that a shell had fallen on one of the high altars and had considerably damaged it.

This youngster had the grit, for he was as cool as a cucumber under fire, and with his battalion had been nearly all day where bullets flew thicker than flies in Egypt.

"That was quite a shake-up," referring to the shell explosion in the cathedral, "but," assuming

the easy air of one accustomed to such things, "it wasn't a marker to some of the whacks I've seen coming from those howitzers.

"I'm from Dover; name Stetson; came over with the marine brigade; from where does your ticket read?"

The youthful bugler was looking at Billy.

"From Bangor, Maine, United States of America; Barry is the family handle, and the front name is Billy.

"Mr. Stetson, I'll have you know Mr. Henri Trouville and Mr. Joseph Mouselle, I think that is the way you pronounce it, isn't it, Reddy?"

"Oh, call me Jimmy," jovially urged the newcomer; "what's 'misters' between friends?"

"Did you know Capt. Leonidas Johnson and Mr. Josiah Freeman in Dover?" asked Billy.

"Did I know them?" cried Jimmy. "Did I know the town-clock and the wharves? They're the flying machine men, and I have hung around their hangars so much that I must have worn out my welcome. To tell the truth, though, I am on the waver between an aëroplane and a submarine. I've have had some training, too, in the underwater boats. Say, coming back at you, do you know Capt. Johnson, or just heard of him?"

"Rather well acquainted with him, I should imagine," stated Billy with a smile; "Henri and I rode up here in the captain's seaplane."

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"Gee whiz, then, you're the Aviator Boys I have heard about. I was in London when that happened, and when I came back to Dover to say farewell to mother I had no more than time to wave a hand to the captain before the ship sailed for Ostend."

"Do you mean to say that Captain Johnson and Josh. Freeman are in Dover?" was Billy's excited query.

"Just so," stoutly maintained Jimmy. "I saw them with my own eyes."

"Glory be!" Billy was happiest when he said that.

"Hear that, Henri, old boy? Capt. Johnson and Freeman are safe in Dover."

Billy could not help repeating the glad tidings.

"Wonder how they got away?"

Henri would have been mightily pleased to talk it over with the old boys that very minute.

Billy had already added Jimmy to his good friend list, and these two kept up a running fire of questions aimed at one another.

Aëroplanes and submarines were dissected and put together again many times during the lively conversation.

"How did you get so far from the water? You ought to be blowing a fog-horn instead of a bugle, Jimmy."

"I'll tell you, Billy," replied Jimmy, "that it was

just a fluke that I got anywhere outside of prisoners' quarters. They picked up a bunch of us at Nieuport, and one of the German officers asked me if I had run away from school. The fact that they classed me kindergarten furnished me the chance of skipping, and I starved my way to the camp of the Coldstream Guards. They were going my way or I was going theirs, and here I am."

The boys had a reminder about that time that a war was going on, for chunks of lead began to purr over the exposed position where they were grouped.

"Blow a retreat," suggested Henri to the bugler; but none of them waited for that signal to get to cover.

So great had grown their confidence in the new friend that Henri and Billy at mess that evening jointly gave him details of their adventures in the château and the tunnel, and even told about the treasure they were carrying.

Jimmy was an eager listener, and as the tale unfolded, his admiration for the prowess of his new comrades reached the top degree.

"I've joined the band," he insisted earnestly, "and I'm going to see you through. Count me in from date."

"If we only had Leon with us now," laughed Henri, "we could push over an army."

"You bet Leon was a good one."

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Billy had more than once declared that if he ever got near to a place where they stocked Christmas ships there would be something special in the cargo for the little Belgian.

When the sergeant roll-called the boys, as usual, that night he was requested to include Jimmy.

"If I adopt a few more of you," he grumbled, "I'll be fit for the presidency of Bedlam."

But the sergeant's bark was far worse than his bite.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SAVED THE DAY!

THE shifting tide of battle had forced the advanced line of the Allies to contend with a strong forward movement of German troops. In the shelter of a wonderfully ingenious and deep-dug trench the boys looked out upon a bloody battlefield, one of the bloodiest in European history.

French soldiers with rifles in their hands, standing or kneeling in the immediate vicinity, keenly peered over the flat land toward the positions known to be held by the Germans, concealed in the woods—forests believed to be bristling with machine guns, backed by infantry in rifle pits and covered trenches.

Time and again the French infantry had found

these positions impossible of taking owing to barbed wire entanglements strewn with brush and branches of trees.

A heavy siege gun supporting the Allies was in action at the time. A French artilleryman with the hand elevating gear rapidly cranked the big barrel down to a level position ready for loading. A second threw open the breech and extracted the brass cartridge case, carefully wiping it out before depositing it among the empties; four more seized the heavy shell and lifted it to a cradle opposite the breech; a seventh rammed it home; number eight gingerly inserted the brass cartridge, half filled with vaseline-like explosive; the breech was closed, and the gun pointer rapidly cranked the gun into position again. In less than thirty seconds the men sprang back from the gun, again loaded and aimed. The mortar sent its shell purring through the air against a German position on a far-off hill. There was an answering burst of flame from the enemy's battery. Both shots were too high. With this incessant trying for range, the sharp whirring sounds in the air seemed almost continuous. And there were hits that pierced ramparts of flesh and blood!

Groups of wounded passed without ceasing, and yet the conflict was ever renewed with death-defying courage. The command to which the boys were attached had been driven from their en-

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trenchment by literal showers of shells, and fell back to the headquarters of yesterday.

They were threatened from all sides with annihilation, hemmed in by walls of steel and sheets of flame, on three sides by bayonets, and on the other by blazing batteries.

The left wing of the Allies was in desperate encounter also and unable to effect a junction with and relieve the tremendous pressure on the right.

Twenty-five miles away were stationed troops of cavalymen standing at the heads of their chargers, ready to jump into the saddle at a moment's call and stem any torrent of infantry that came their way. These cavalymen had been so held in reserve by the Allies, because of the burrowing campaign that had been conducted in the immediate vicinity of the battlefield. But now that the fighting had burst the confines of the trenches they were sorely needed.

There was one way only to summon the reserves in time, so desperate was the situation. That was by *aéroplane*. But two machines of the French command had escaped destruction, and but one man of the aviation corps out of six who was not among the missing, wounded or killed.

This survivor, eager to serve, was ordered into his *aéroplane* and the machine hurtled aloft. The flyer made a fearless attempt to cross the field at a height of a quarter of a mile. Bullets from

guns mounted on top of a slope pierced the aëroplane's gasoline tank, causing the fuel to escape and forcing the pilot to attempt to glide to the earth. On reaching the ground he tried to defend himself with a revolver, but was quickly captured.

The French commander, at the sight, shrugged his shoulders, and with a despairing gesture turned to Colonel Bainbridge, with the words:

"It is all over."

Henri heard the remark, and in wild excitement fairly leaped toward the officers.

"There's another machine, and two of us left who know how to run it. We're ready!"

The French officer recognized the speaker as one of the boys who had located the German battery when his own aviators had failed to make a find.

"What do you think of it?" he asked Colonel Bainbridge.

"I think that they can save the day," solemnly asserted the officer addressed.

"To the front, Billy!" loudly called Henri.

Billy was already "to the front"—he was testing the machine in preparation for instant flight.

Jimmy and Reddy were there with the shove that started the aëroplane rolling; our Aviator Boys were in their places, and away they went. They did not risk any low flight to attract high range

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guns, but streaked for the clouds from the very start.

Like an arrow, but even speedier, they moved a mile a minute, and, descending, displayed the French colors to check a chance shot from some enterprising cavalryman.

The message delivered, there was a great ado about boots and saddles, and the mounted troops galloped like mad toward the scene of action.

Again rising high, the boys slackened pace that they might watch the progress of the cavalry below, for as swiftly as these seasoned horses might traverse the distance, they were as snails to an aëroplane.

The flyers saw the cavalymen hurl themselves into the conflict on the plain, and saw men and charging horses go down here and there, and infantrymen everywhere under furious onslaught.

So formidable was the attack of the fresh troops that they won their way to the position where their surrounded comrades were making what they thought to be their last stand against overwhelming odds.

It was, though, at fearful cost, through a bloody lane, and over ground strewn with dead and wounded.

The young airmen themselves had a close call before completing their hazardous journey; a bullet struck the machine, causing it to lurch as though

reeling from a blow, and Billy had to throw the wheel hard around to prevent the aëroplane from rolling right over upon its side.

But, diving and swerving, the good craft swept down, while the relief and the relieved regiments rent the air with cheers.

Our Aviator Boys had saved the day!

CHAPTER XXX.

SETTING OUT FOR THE SEA.

VERDUN to Mezieres, near the historic field of Sedan; Dinant, Namur—names of everyday reading now, on the northern army route to Brussels. Colonel Bainbridge, Sergeant Scott, the Boy Aviators, Jimmy and Reddy were all in the march for the coast region. The Trouville jewels and gold had been sewn into four canvas belts, and one assigned to each of the boys, who wore them under their blouses. It was the intention of Henri and his young comrades to accompany the command until it reached the vicinity of some near coast point, where they planned to try for a ship voyage that would end in the English Channel.

Jimmy had no military ties to hold him with the Coldstream Guards; he was a waif until he found his own command.

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"Give me even a day on the old stamping grounds," he said, "and it's me that will be a jolly boy."

"Wish there was a bridge over the briny deep," chimed in Billy, "and I know somebody who would soon start on the long walk to Bangor."

Henri was thinking of his mother, and Reddy was never out of his dream of Paris.

West Flanders was the scene of incessant military operations, and like an island was cut off from the rest of Belgium, through the blowing up of the bridges leading thereto. Peasants were obliged to make emergency bridges from planks, and crawl along these to escape from the danger zone.

Among the last memories, outside of fighting, that the boys carried from Belgium, were of the bedraggled men and women suffering through cold and hunger.

The Germans had declared the territory west of the railroad running from Brussels to Antwerp an official war area, where nobody, including even Germans, were allowed to travel without a special military passport.

"Now," said Jimmy, "we're on the dead-line; even if we could get into Antwerp, it's ten to one that we couldn't get out, and so what's the use of getting in?"

"But I'd rather take the chances of getting out of this wasp's nest by water than by attempting

to break through any more wholesale killings on the land."

That was Billy's view. He was war-worn.

"But we're going back by water," assured Jimmy, "only it won't have to be exactly from Antwerp. I've voyaged several times to Flushing—that's in The Netherlands, you know—and once among the Dutch, and in the Scheldt river. I know a trick or two to get out on the North Sea."

"You're the captain on this trip," conceded Henri; "if we can't sail from Antwerp, let's push along anywhere, so long as its up-coast, even to The Hague. Once in neutral territory, some of our troubles are over."

"'Some' is the way to put it, Henri," remarked Billy, "for if you had said 'all our troubles' I'd think you were figuring on our final rest at the bottom of the sea."

"Well, it's just this way," continued Jimmy. "I believe I know a route, rounding Antwerp on the east, that will take us out of fighting ground, and in the town of Santvlieto, on the Scheldt, I have a friend who is mate on a trade vessel, regularly running between Flushing and the channel. I feel sure that he is home, for there are so many mines planted in the North Sea now that it isn't safe to risk anything that isn't insured to the limit."

"But isn't Santvlieto quite a way up the river

from Flushing?" asked Henri, who knew something of the coast line near Antwerp.

"Easy distance in a boat," advised Jimmy. "I've been up and down several times with my friend."

"Let's take the matter up with the colonel," suggested Billy.

The boys all agreed to that, and the colonel strongly advised them to get out of the war zone, if they could do it in safety.

"It's hard to part with you, though, my brave boys, and," particularly addressing Billy and Henri, "I can never forget that it was you who gave my dear dead son the best burial you could. I hope we can go to that grave together some day. I will never forget, either, that daring adventure of your own when you saved our command from being annihilated. Here, sergeant," calling to that officer who was drilling some raw recruits nearby, "come and get your release as caretaker of these youngsters."

Sergeant Scott stood as straight as a ramrod, facing the colonel and his young friends.

When he heard what the boys proposed to do, the sergeant bent his head for an instant, then spoke gruffly, with a little husky note, too:

"Fall in, you lads; eyes right; salute!"

With all gravity salutes were exchanged.

"We can give them convoy, can't we, colonel?"

"Yes, sergeant," quickly replied the colonel,

"give them protection as far on the way as you think best."

With that the fine soldier and gentleman turned to address some of the staff assembling for conference.

The protecting force of cavalry were with the boys to a point within five miles of the frontier, and all was clear.

The sergeant gave each of the boys an iron hand grip, and, leading the horses the boys had ridden, the troop wheeled and soon disappeared in a cloud of dust.

Billy, Henri and the sergeant were to meet again, but not in France or Belgium.

An hour later the boys were in neutral territory, and it was the first breath they had drawn in peace in many a day.

But of lasting peace, not yet.

Hans Troutman was at home, and sorry for it—not because of the unexpected visit of his young friend from Dover—he was delighted over that,—but simply because Hans was a thrifty fellow who did not like even to waste time, let alone money.

While the good mother in the little house on the big river was setting the oilcloth table-cover, with the kind of a meal that appeals to the robust feeder, Henri was making a business proposition to Hans.

Hans gloried in business propositions, and he

could understand them in three separate and distinct languages.

Fifty gold franc pieces for his company and his boat to Flushing.

Fifty more if he put the boys on a ship that was bound for the English Channel.

"It's just like finding it," said Hans, lighting his pipe.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LIKE A MIRACLE OF OLD.

THREE Dutch men-of-war, with steam up, lay off Flushing, ready to defend the neutrality of their waters.

All vessels were forbidden to clear from the port and enter the North Sea after nightfall, and on the sanded floor of the tap-room, in a sailors' house of rest, our boys were impatiently scraping their feet, awaiting sunrise. In their anxiety to get away without submitting to intimate inspection, they had no desire for napping.

With their belts, these boys represented a money valuation of more than a million francs.

Since arrival in Flushing, the day before, Hans had been an active mover at the mouth of the Scheldt, and for shipping news an eager seeker.

At this particular date, the rumor among men

of the nautical trade was that, in the rough sea, anchored mines were often going loose, and a bobbing mine is not apt to have any discretion as to the keel with which it collides.

"I've heard dozens of mines explode in a single day," said one captain to Hans. The latter had heard a few himself.

In addition to mines, the sea was crowded with torpedo boat destroyers, submarines of all sorts and descriptions, and with cruisers the waters fairly reeked. There, too, were the steam trawlers, either engaged in laying or "sweeping" for mines. These "sweepers" run in pairs. Between each pair a steel net is suspended. The theory is that mines, whether floating or anchored, will be caught by that net. Then one of the destroyers, which are constantly darting about, is signaled, and destroys the mine by a single shot.

Overhead, Zeppelins and other aircraft continually circled, dropping bombs where they would do the most harm to those whom the airmen desired to harm the most, and sometimes harm was done without intent.

Once out of the Scheldt, and trouble was likely to begin any minute, particularly for any craft considered unfriendly by the British fleet.

A narrow lane had been slashed—as a woodsman would say—through the sea. Outside of it there was danger everywhere.

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Such was the situation when Hans introduced Captain Eberhardt to the restless four in the house of rest.

The captain was a man of few words, and had a firecracker way of delivering them.

He said he owned a "scow with a funnel in it," and he was one of the pilots who were trusted to take boats through. The shoals in the shallow and muddy water of the North Sea had been well marked in times of peace, but now only here and there to be seen by the men at the wheel, for guides, were big red "war buoys."

Henri had taken from the belts sufficient gold for even extraordinary passage money for himself and comrades, and jingled the coins on the deal table at which the party were sitting.

"We want to get out of here at daybreak, if you can swing it, captain," he said.

The captain looked at the coins and then at his watch, a massive silver timepiece, hitched to his broad vest-front by twisted links of steel.

"Bring 'em down"—the captain addressing Hans in Dutch.

Hans nodded assent, and kept the captain company to the door, where they apparently completed arrangements.

When the cuckoo in the clock, shelved above the fancy tiled fireplace, warbled the hour of 4 a. m.,

Hans shook the sleepy attendant into a waking moment, and hustled him after cakes and coffee.

At 5 o'clock Hans and the boys dropped again into the boat in which they had floated down from Santvlieto.

Captain Eberhardt's vessel was in anchor in the sloppy waters off Flushing, and the captain was aboard when Hans and the boys climbed to the deck.

The captain had also, just previously, been visited by members of the coast guard service, but as he was well known, and not a character under suspicion, this visit was wholly informal.

At 7 o'clock the vessel weighed anchor, and steamed out to sea.

With Flushing far behind them, the boys began to notice an occasional appearance above the waves of a slim gray periscope, a long tube fitted with a series of prisms, which enable the men guiding the submarines to obtain a view of the surrounding water.

When several of these under water boats showed at once, half submerged, and men could be seen huddled together in the barrels of bridges, Jimmy's delight knew no bounds.

"What do you think of them, now, you flying catapults?" he called to the boys.

"Wouldn't mind taking a ride in one, old top," was Billy's genial observation.

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"You'd like it when you got used to it," advised Jimmy.

"What's up now?"

Henri's startled question referred to a dull sound, that came from a point quartering to their course, and a fountain of water spurting into the air.

"A mine let go, I'll bet," surmised Henri.

"You're right, and a corker, too," admitted Jimmy.

The captain had evidently sighted something else from his position on the bridge, for his firecracker voice shouted the order:

"Run up those flags!"

Three miles away a fleet of a half dozen destroyers were tearing toward the little steamer, with black bands of smoke striking down from each raking funnel.

The captain on the bridge had seen an impatient signal snapping from the flagship of the fleet.

The curiosity of the fleet was soon satisfied, but the captain complained that they ought to have known that he and his ship were no strangers in these parts.

He little reckoned, then, that the good old hulk was to get its wrecking blow that night from the inside and not the outside.

The boys, when the bell strokes were counting 10 o'clock, were still in the vessel's bow, where

they had been since the early evening, talking of the many dangers that lurked in the misty nooks of these turbulent waters.

"I guess I'll turn in," yawned Billy. "This craft is an awful drag; it's been acting like a street car on an avenue with two hundred crossings. Come on, fellows."

The words were hardly spoken, when the deck beneath them gave a sickening heave, with a deafening roar in its wake.

The time-worn boilers in the engine room had rebelled at last, and, bursting, they split the seasoned fabric that immediately confined them into countless pieces.

By the upheaval the boys were violently thrown over the deck railing and into the churning water below.

Breathless and half-stunned, they instinctively struck out in swimming stroke, and from them the wreck drifted away into the darkness.

Weighted down by the heavy belts, in addition to their clothing, the swimmers were soon exhausted.

The end was near!

They swam close together, anticipating it.

One more despairing reach for life—and life was there!

The swimmers' outstretched arms rested on the bridge of a submarine!

CHAPTER XXXII.

LIKE A DREAM OF GOOD LUCK.

THROUGH the conning tower hatch of the submarine emerged a sailor, holding high a brilliant flare that looked like a small searchlight.

"What's your number, lads?" he hailed.

"Four of us, sir," weakly responded Jimmy.

The sailor stepped out on the slippery deck of the boat, that alternately rose and fell in the swell of the sea.

"Whereaway?" questioned the sailor.

"To the bottom of the sea, if you don't give us a lift," replied Jimmy.

The sailor turned to the hatch, sent a call below, and two more jaunty tars sprang through the opening.

One of the last comers was just a youngster in years, but evidently qualified for his dangerous calling.

"By the ghost of Bloomsbury Park," he exclaimed, when extending a helping hand to Jimmy, and when the latter's face showed in the shine of the flare, "if it isn't Stetson!"

"I'll be blowed if it isn't Ned!" Jimmy had joined familiar company, it seemed.

"Seven hands 'round, Jimmy," cried the young sailor, "did you drop from the clouds?"

"No," said Jimmy, wringing the water from his cap, "I came by the boiler route to help celebrate your birthday."

In the meantime, Jimmy's fellow swimmers had been assisted to the deck, and were practicing again the art of drawing a long breath.

All of the wet ones had begun to shiver, for the wind had a sharp edge to it.

"Bring them below"—this command from the conning tower, by a fourth sailor, who appeared to speak with authority.

Glad of the chance to get under cover, the chilly explosion survivors followed the officer below the hatch, and immensely enjoyed the warmth of the snug quarters.

"You'll find this isn't much of a passenger boat, my lads; it fits too tight to suit most people." This remark from the officer showing the way.

"It felt mighty good to us when we couldn't find the bottom of the sea with our feet."

Billy's happy disposition was again working.

It was Jimmy's hour, this business of being inside of a submarine. Our Aviator Boys might be princes of the air, but down here Jimmy Stetson was the ace, and all the other cards. He could not give Henri any points that would puzzle about the gasoline engine that furnished the power when

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the craft was running on the surface, and, perhaps, not a great deal that was new about the electric motor that propelled the boat when under the water, but to all of the visiting boys, except Jimmy, there was much of mystery about the way the vessel was raised and lowered.

How, when the ballast tanks are full, they sink the hull of the submarine until only the periscope and top of the conning tower are visible, and, when empty, the whole of the conning tower, superstructure, and a portion of the hull ride above the water.

How hydroplanes—short, broad fins—tilt the nose of the vessel so that the propeller can drive the craft down fifty or sixty feet.

Jimmy knew all about it, and the sailors let him have all the pleasure of telling it to his wondering companions.

The guarded screw propeller aft and outside, the vertical steering rudders behind it, the air flasks which supply the crew with air when the vessel is submerged, the torpedo equipment—all the details thereof were reeled off by the Dover boy with great gusto.

Ned Belton, with whom Jimmy had trained for submarine service in London, laughingly nominated his friend, there and then, for head talker on a sight-seeing 'bus.

With roving commission, the submarine was la-

zily drifting, half submerged, within sight of the lighthouse with the famous hexagonal tower, near Nieuport-Bains, a little seaside resort in Belgium.

The boys had realized that it was considerable of a cramp for the submarine to carry passengers in the limited space allotted to the crew, and barring this extreme emergency, it would not have done at all for this fighting machine to serve any other than the purpose intended.

It was agreed that the submarine would go as far as Dunkirk, in the hope that opportunity would there present itself for the passengers to pursue the returning course in some other vessel.

A surprise beyond any dream of great fortune awaited them at Dunkirk.

This port just then was a working out point for aircraft for scout duty on the North Sea.

From the conning tower of the submarine Henri and Billy were watching with keen interest the aërial maneuvers then in progress. Suddenly the lighter machines were overshadowed by a flying shape that darted like an eagle among sparrows.

The long, tapering hull, and the float attachments, the trim, wicked gun in the bow, proclaimed this giant patrol of the air a fighting sea-plane.

With engines quiet, down dived the great steel-breasted bird; then a swift upturning and she shot level upon the water and rode the waves like a swan.

A stone could easily have been tossed from the bridge of the submarine upon the upper plane of the aircraft, so near together were they.

The pilot of the sea-plane turned to view the rival factor in modern warfare, half rising as he did so.

Mutual recognition flashed across the few separating yards of distance.

"Hello, captain!" shouted Billy.

"Hello yourself, 'Billy Barry!'" came the answering shout.

"Whoopee!" This was Josh. Freeman's joyful contribution, as he poked a grimy face from the tiny engine room of the big flyer.

"Sling us a line," called the captain.

Ned made the cast with a stout bit of hemp, and the aircraft was drawn alongside of the submarine.

"Put 'er there, boys," commanded Captain Johnson, reaching for Billy's outstretched hand; "and there's Henri, bless you, my lad; give me the grip; sure this is good for sore eyes."

Josh did not stop at handshaking, he encircled both boys in his brawny arms and set their ribs to cracking.

"Well, for all that's out," exclaimed the captain, spying Jimmy, who was just appearing above the hatch, "here's a whole garden of daisies! Tip us your fin, Jimmy, and let me tell you that your mother is looking for you."

"Why, I thought you had gone for a soldier, you Dover dandy," put in Josh, as he playfully saluted Jimmy.

"Here's another of the flock," said Billy, pushing Reddy forward for inspection.

"When I get all of you aboard," commented the captain, "it will look like I was trying to outdo Noah. But come a runnin' and I'll pack you all in somewhere, being as there are two lightweights among the four," referring to Jimmy and Reddy, "and none of you much heavier than a pound of butter."

The crew of the submarine came in for some heartfelt expressions of gratitude on the part of the boys, whose lives they had saved, and Ned was privately made banker for some tobacco money for the men.

"This is like old times," contentedly remarked Billy, as he heard again the drone of the sea-plane motors.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SEALED PACKET.

"WE'RE not in the soldier business," explained Captain Johnson to the boys; "it's just a 'trying out' on contract on which we are now engaged. The old machine is somewhere in Ostend, and I

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guess it's going to be a dead loss to us. You ask how we broke out of Ypres. Well, we convinced a good sport in authority that it was just the wind that blew us into the German lines, and we would favor any gale that would blow us out again.

"He had seen us as aërial performers once upon a time at Ostend, and being an infantryman of the old school, he privately regarded the whole flying fraternity in the light of circus stars. He did, however, concede that if anything counted for much above ground, it was the invention of his friend, Count Zeppelin.

"As matters warmed up around Ypres, we were hustled back to Ostend, and hung around there for some time, on parole, they called it, until one day we were permitted to board a hospital ship bound for Calais.

"We can't show any scars, nor bullet holes in our clothes—not a thing to add to our glorious achievement of turning you boys loose in the war zone."

The captain by this time had heard all about the adventures of his young friends.

"In this fuel test," he continued, "we can give you a lift that may pretty near, if not quite, land you where you want to go. I wouldn't mind sailing into Paris myself, but there are no free agents at the working end of a contract. I don't know yet."

"Wake me and shake me at the mouth of the Thames," exulted Jimmy, "show me the docks at Tilbury, see that there is a light in the window for me at Dover, and then won't I be the horse for the Paris wagon!"

"Bully boy!" applauded Josh.

"Now get snug, you youngsters," said the captain—"two in the bow and two aft with Josh."

"Give her power, Freeman."

The planes were set for the upward flight, and the course for the Straits of Dover.

Reddy was the only "cat in a strange garret" when the sea-plane cut through the air. The little Frenchman had never had a like sensation, and he soon began to revel in it, even though he could look sheer down through 3,000 feet of space and see the heaving sea.

The captain lowered the flight along the French coast, for the soldiers all down the line had been warned not to fire on the sea-plane, it having been generally announced in wireless orders that it was an English airship out on a trial run. The schedule included Boulogne, and the boys had the opportunity of looking down upon the city where Napoleon had once encamped his troops.

Swinging 'round and circling backward, the sea-plane hovered over Calais. Somebody had evidently forgotten orders, for when the big machine was directly above the military governor's head-

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quarters a half dozen or more soldiers seized their rifles and commenced firing at the aviators. Out rushed an officer, crying:

"C'est un Anglais! C'est un Anglais! Ne tirez plus! (It is an Englishman! It is an Englishman! Stop firing!)

The sea-plane dropped into the harbor off Calais, and all except Josh, remaining as faithful guardian of his precious motors, went ashore.

The captain there hoped to solve the problem of getting his young friends safely to Paris, and the boys certainly wished him the best kind of luck in the effort. Both French approval and English backing would help some in the way of hastening unmolested progress.

On Rue de Moscow the boys discovered that these were days when there was something doing every minute in Calais. Clouds of smoke rose from sputtering motors, whizzing to and fro, some loaded with soldiers, some with food, while others were hastening for the field of battle.

Refugees from almost everywhere in the war zone filled the town to the point of overflow—and such a medley of French and Flemish! Men wearing blood-stained bandages, old women, babies in arms, worn out and half starved

The great warehouses, the Hotel de Ville, the railway station, lace factories, private residences,

and even ships in the harbor, were used as sleeping quarters.

"We can't get away from it," sighed Henri, as the party noted a limping procession of Belgian soldiers caked with mud, worn faces covered with three or four weeks' growth of beard, and who looked like they had exhausted the last drop of energy and patience they had.

"And they are coming in by the thousands," volunteered a bystander.

The boys waited near the Maritime station while the captain made his visit of state to one in authority, with whom he was well acquainted.

Presently the captain hove in sight, accompanied by a Belgian gendarme, one of the force then engaged in patrolling the city. This was evidently a guard of honor, for the captain had no appearance of being disturbed by arrest.

"Now, youngsters," he briskly announced, "there is a bit of a conference arranged for you, so put on your best front. It won't be like a visit to a dentist, I assure you."

In a street not far removed from the Victoria hotel, the captain ushered his young charges into the vestibule of a pretentious looking residence, and guided by a smiling secretary the visitors were soon in the presence of a man of most distinguished bearing and cordial manner, who instantly rose from his chair behind a desk littered with papers.

"I have the pleasure, I believe," he said in English, with only a trace of the softer accent, "of making the acquaintance of young men who fly like birds, and, also, who have seen much in the battlefields."

The boys bent their heads in acknowledgment of his kindly accusation.

"The captain here tells me that you have an important mission in Paris, of a strictly personal nature," continued the genial host, when all were seated.

"We have, sir," responded Henri.

"You are a Trouville, I understand?"

"Yes, sir," answered Henri.

"I know that family well," observed the questioner. "Some of my people and yours, history tells, had mutual interests in the long ago."

"I am very proud of that, sir."

"Why, you are quite a young diplomat," laughed the gentleman behind the desk.

"But," he continued, "it is at the present we are looking."

"My dear Anglin," turning to his ever smiling secretary, "hand me that portfolio."

From the portfolio case the speaker took a sealed packet, closed by red wax, and tape-wound.

"In Paris, my dear boy," addressing Henri, "you will deliver this to the address written thereon, and," in impressive tone, "I should regret exceed-

ingly if it should fall into any other hands than those authorized to receive it.

"Remember that!

"The captain will give you all other necessary instructions.

"My young friends, permit me to say bon soir."
(Good evening.)

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT THE FRONT DOOR OF PARIS.

"You made quite a hit with his nobs," remarked Billy to Henri when the party reached the street, and started for the Maritime station.

"Wasn't he fine, though!" exclaimed Henri.

"You'll find that he has the say when it comes to moving about in France these times," asserted the captain. "You're a lucky lot, I tell you."

"I think we owe you something for all this, captain," suggested Billy.

"Oh, well," replied the captain, "that's all in the family, anyhow. There's a certain old gentleman over in the States who never went back on me—and you are a down-to-date picture of him, Billy."

Josh had given the engine end of the sea-plane

a thorough overhauling, refilled the tanks, and was ready, he claimed, to sail to the moon.

"Never saw such a hungry place as Calais is now," he grumbled. "The old lady running the nearest bakery told me a little while ago that she never sold so much bread before in all her life, and the ovens couldn't half keep up with the demand. I don't believe, either, that there is a cupful of milk in the town."

"You seem to have fallen down as a grub hunter, old man," jested the captain. "But there is no use growling," he added, "the machine lockers are pretty full yet."

Indeed, there was no immediate danger of the airmen starving.

Henri was chiefly occupied, during the exchange between the captain and Josh, in thinking of the new care put upon him in the matter of the sealed packet, and if it was once, it was twenty times in the hour, that he clutched at his breast, where the parcel reposed. The carrying of jewels and gold around his waist he passed as an old experience. It was merely a habit, now.

But the mystery about the packet appealed to the boy, and imagination magnified the trust until it weighed about a ton on his mind.

The captain had not yet revealed his program of action, and it was with great difficulty that

Henri restrained his growing impatience at the delay.

After a hearty attack on the food supply of the sea-plane, the captain, behind a pipeful of the stoutest tobacco to be found on the continent, announced that there would be no flying that night. The skipper of a fishing smack had just brought in the rumor from Dover that several bombs had been dropped from hostile aëroplanes upon that famous fortified naval harbor. The skipper had also heard that the damage inflicted by the bombs was light. The captain, under the circumstances, could not well afford to take chances with a costly machine that did not belong to him, by night flight. With such rumors on the wireless flashing down the coast, there was no telling what might happen to an aviator who could not show his colors.

From this it may be surmised that the captain had no instructions to put the boys on the night express from Calais to Paris.

"Say, captain, how long do we have to stay here?"

Henri had set to angling for information.

"Overnight, anyhow," briefly replied the captain. The truth of the matter is, he was secretly enjoying this bit of teasing, and, further, he was himself in doubt until a certain messenger should arrive with a wired for permit to use the sea-plane out of designated area.

Here the magic in the name of the authority to whom the captain had appealed that day in Calais was first in evidence. Though all people in the town were forbidden to ride on bicycles after 9 p. m., this rigid rule then prevailing was apparently not enforced against a wheelman who arrived at the Maritime station at 10 o'clock, with a yellow envelope addressed to Captain Johnson.

The captain read the message, pocketed it, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, told Josh to set the lights in the floating sea-plane and to take the first watch, promising relief at 1 o'clock. The friendly skipper invited them all to spread their blankets on the deck of the smack.

At dawn the sea-plane splashed a start and took to the air.

"We're off for Havre!"

This from the man at the wheel.

Havre, at the mouth of the Seine, and the seaport for Paris, next to Marseilles the most important in France.

Henri now had a fair idea of the route they were to follow.

"It's simply great of you, captain," acclaimed Henri.

"I said 'near, if not quite,' you remember," trumpeted the captain, for the noise of the flying machine would have drowned any softer sound.

"Oh, you Havre!" cried Jimmy, when ship-

masts loomed like a forest of bare poles far below.

With marked precision and care, the captain swung into the port, which thousands of watercraft entered every year.

The coming of the sea-plane had evidently been heralded by a swifter agent of the air, the wonderful wireless, for no sooner had the flying machine found clear space in the basin, than it was rapidly approached by a small motor-boat, in which were seated three men, the one looking out from the elevated bow exhibiting an empty coat sleeve and the glitter of an honor decoration upon his breast.

"Is it Rue Castiglione?" he hailed.

"No; it is Rue de Rivoli," called the captain.

Only names of noted boulevards in Paris—and evidently used in agreement to insure recognition.

With the uttering of the passwords, there was no further attempt to speak in riddles.

"Which of the boys?"

He of the one arm was closely inspecting the sea-plane company.

The captain nodded toward Henri.

"Your hand, young sir," said he with only one to offer. "I knew your father before you, and of that I am proud."

Henri was beginning to believe that a Trouville could not be lost in France.

"Come into the boat," urged this new found friend.

"But there are three more to go," stated Henri.

"Ah, I see, you have attendants?"

"Not that, my dear sir; we are all of one rank, and we move on the same spring."

"What you wish is a command," politely conceded the man in the boat; "will the four come aboard?"

"It's all in the deal," said the captain, in a low tone to Henri. "I'll have to quit here, and you boys are to go on. But it's good luck and not good-by that I'm saying now. It's not far to Dover, you know."

When the motor chugged away, the four boys were in it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FLIGHT UP THE SEINE.

THE motor-boat swiftly threaded its way into the Seine, guided with the greatest skill, for it was a crowded waterway, and landing was made at the base of a stone staircase leading to extensive grounds, surrounding one of those old time mansions still holding its dignity against the modern building advances and commercial activity now prevailing in what was once Havre de Grace,

named from a chapel of Notre Dame de Grace, founded in 1509.

From a large bay window of an upper room of the mansion, to which the boys were taken by order of the man with the empty sleeve, they could see great ship building yards and the tall chimneys of sugar refineries.

Looking at the tapestry-hung walls, Billy remarked: "This reminds me of Arras."

"Sure, it does," agreed Henri. "But," he added, "without the noise of the big guns."

"Wonder if it isn't train time?"

Jimmy evidently did not approve of all this ceremony over the short journey still before them.

"You'd think it was an affair of state," he concluded.

"But you must remember, Jimmy," advised Henri, "that Paris is something of a closed town, these days. They are not advertising for visitors up there, unless they come in uniform, and of the right color. I, for one, don't want to be searched," feeling for the packet inside his shirt-front, and giving also a tug to the treasure belt.

"Right you are," approved Billy, "and when you figure that we haven't a passport among us. Mine was soaked to a pulp when that old scow blew up and strewed the sea with us. I couldn't this minute prove that I was from Bangor."

"We're all members of the Don't Worry club,

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and we have always alighted on our feet," was Henri's cheerful view. "Besides, we're traveling under sealed orders, so to speak, and it's up to the fellow who is personally conducting this excursion."

The last mentioned personage just then put in appearance, smiling and making apology for being so long away from his guests.

"I have some rare good news for you," he impressively announced—"and a plan that will be much to your liking, I think"—looking at Henri, and with a side glance at Billy.

"The letter from my friend, whose name I shall not mention, and which monsieur the captain handed to me, I had not read until I left you, and I knew not until the reading that of the air two of you are masters. It is splendid, and it so beautifully fits. Pardon the enthusiasm of a Frenchman, but so superb is the idea, I must speak this way. You shall go to Paris, not among the locked in of the railway carriages, not in the cabin of some little steamer—like a bird you shall go. Is it not grand?"

Billy had begun to believe that the speaker had stopped too often in the cafés during the visit downtown, but so convincing was the statement which followed that he felt sorry for holding such a belief:

"In this port there have just arrived three of

the new military aëroplanes, so much larger than the little ones that have been sent out from the forts in Paris for scouting—these bigger ones give room for an observer to move and signal, and the pilot may attend alone to his duty of managing the machine.

“You understand the foreign make?”

It would evidently have been a sore disappointment to the eager proposer if the answer were contrary to his hope.

“They all look alike to us,” assured Henri.

“Glorious! It is but the one thing, to put together these fine birds, to fly them to Paris, and when they are there, so you are there. What benefit for all. Gilbert! Gilbert!”

Responding to the call of the excitable host, a stocky built youth with a shock of coal-black hair of such length that it mixed with his eyebrows, and who had evidently been awaiting the result of the conference upstairs, sauntered through the doorway.

“For what would you take him?”

Billy thought that he would not “take him” at any price for beauty, but he politely guessed:

“Artist?”

“Ah! That is it—he is one artist like yourselves—he is the great scout of the air. Gilbert LeFane of Rouen.”

"I fear it is too much honor, monsieur, that you have bestowed upon me. I but serve."

"But what gallant service it is. Permit me now, my dear Gilbert, to present the youths who also fly with the best, Monsieur Trouville and Baree, also the young men who travel with them."

Jimmy and Reddy felt a couple of inches growth through the tops of their heads. Billy was thinking how "Baree" would sound in Bangor.

Gilbert spoke rapidly and to the point. He was here to receive the *aéroplanes* which had been specially built for his government. An expert assistant in assembling these machines was overdue, and it was a matter of emergency—of great emergency, he emphasized.

To his patriotic friend, who had so generously praised him a few minutes before, he had confided his troubles, and this meeting was arranged. Would the young gentlemen volunteer for this relief service?

The young gentlemen would—and did, and in less than a day, the new machines were set to the tune of flight.

The master of the mansion was a picture of delight over the success of that which he had brought about, and even cherished a fond hope that he had permanently added to the flying corps of his beloved France.

He assured the boys that when they followed

Gilbert in the air trip up the Seine to the capital, it was insuring them a welcome beyond anything they could have expected—doubly welcome, indeed, with this and with the endorsement of the power at Calais.

“I wish I knew how far his knowledge goes regarding the sealed packet that I am carrying,” thought Henri.

But about this, Henri discreetly resolved not to ask any questions.

As to the manner of proceeding on their aërial journey, it was decided, of course, that Gilbert should lead in one machine, Henri and Reddy in the second, and Billy and Jimmy in the third.

They followed the course of the river, as the crow flies, land crossing and cutting out the big bends, and with never a mishap, so perfectly were the machines adjusted and so expertly managed—a master hand at every wheel.

Billy said to Jimmy that surely Joseph’s coat never had as many buttons on it as there were towns, little and big, along this line of travel.

But when he looked down on Paris, on its quays and embankments, on its magnificent public squares, on its beautiful gardens, on its lofty towers, all surrounded by twenty-two miles of fortifications, Billy rested on the guiding wheel in silent admiration.

The grim visage of war was pale in the distance.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE WAY THAT WENT WRONG.

ALONG the outworks of Paris our Aviator Boys had the delight of hearing of the war exploits of some of the greatest airmen of their time, Paulhan, the hero of the English tour from London to Manchester; Brindejonc des Moulinais, Garros, Vedrines, and last, but not least, the very Gilbert LeFane, whom they had followed through the air from Havre to the capital.

While it had been said that French *aéroplanes* had never been seen above the French lines, though many machines of the opposing power were constantly reconnoitering over the heads of the French soldiers, it was well known within the circle that this aviation corps had been operating not only on the German lines, but considerably to the rear of them, and many and brilliant were the achievements of intimate record.

Within the first few hours after their arrival in Paris—not the laughter-loving city of yesterday, but the militant Paris of to-day—the boys had a glimpse of the military dictator, the commanding figure of the hour, General Joffre, on whom all France relies—a man of medium height, stout, with a massive head, thick drooping mus-

tache, and heavy eyebrows nearly concealing his eyes.

As Gilbert remarked, "he had an easy-going manner until he sets his jaws. By the way," he added, "how would you like to show him what the new machines can do?"

To perform before General Joffre! Our Aviator Boys fairly gasped at the idea. So closely had they been allied with military doings, and so easily does the war spirit expand by such association, that a great field commander was just about the very top of the list with them. Legions gave devotion to General Joffre and General Sir John French.

From the first line of fortifications, over the enceinte (works forming the main inclosure), to the detached forts still beyond, there was a splendid natural theater for the aërial exhibit, 430 square miles thus enclosed, with an encircling line of 77 miles.

"These machines are certainly the very 'last word' in aëroplane construction," observed Henri, when Gilbert, Billy and himself moved about the hangars engaged in the "tuning up" process.

"Something like the machine in which young Bainbridge took his last ride," recalled Billy.

In all their lives the boys could never forget that sad incident.

To demonstrate the passenger-carrying capacity

of the new aircraft, Gilbert was accompanied in the leading flight by a comrade airman, while Henri took Reddy, and Billy chummed with Jimmy.

The graceful evolutions, and, particularly, the lightning speed shown by the up-to-date machines, excited admiration and wonder. Practically the entire length of the encircling line was traversed in an hour—that is, 77 miles an hour!

Jimmy and Reddy had never before traveled like a ball from a cannon, and even for the practiced aviators it was a little more than their limit.

"The general can't say that there was anything slow about this," asserted Billy, when he climbed down from the wheel-seat at the close of the thrilling performance.

"It was good work."

Gilbert was a man of few words, and he always meant what he said.

He showed that when he said to Henri and Billy, in his earnest way:

"The flying corps would count it a big day if your services could be secured for regular duty."

"But we are not ready to settle down yet," was Billy's plea. He did not want to tie himself to any foreign job.

"It is a temptation," admitted Henri, "yet I must decide with Billy. It's a partnership that won't break."

"And which reminds me," he went on, "that we

have a pressing duty elsewhere, and now that we have given this day to show our gratitude to the kind Gilbert, it is very necessary that we hurry on."

"All the obligation owing is mine," stoutly maintained Gilbert; "you have a thousand times paid for your ride to Paris. Can I do any more now to get a nearer balance?"

"Only give us some directions that we want, and for possible need, something in writing, to ward off suspicious soldiers or gendarmes."

Gilbert provided both, and would also have sent a trooper or two with them had not Henri protested against it.

He felt that having set out on a secret mission, he was going to play the game that way.

It chanced that they must pass through one of the older parts of the city to reach the destination fixed by the address on the packet. It also happened, in this time of war, that of vehicles for hire there were very few running in the central part of the city—and there were none at all to be seen in these outskirts and wilderness of narrow, irregular streets.

Henri had not figured on such a condition as no means of public conveyance, for it had not yet been fully impressed upon him that this was not the same Paris he had known in the past. It was now a city fearful; not a city wonderful.

Getting lost in this part of Paris, and when

the Apache bandits and ghouls of the night found less restraint and greater need, was no merry jest. Henri began to vainly wish that he had accepted Gilbert's offer of an escort. Billy and himself had encountered so many big things in the way of danger and peril in the last few months, so many close calls on land and sea, above and below, that this adventure at first seemed of little moment.

Yet the sinister, lurking menace of these silent, shadowy highways and byways in this beleaguered city was heightened by its very contrast with the scenes of turmoil in which the boys had participated, and where death stalked them with open hand.

"I'm stumped if I know just where Gilbert told me to make the turn that would set us straight for the Rue de Rivoli. Here's night come upon us, and the high lights all out for fear of the Zeppelins, so you really can't tell whether you are going or coming. Never thought for a moment but what we could hail a cab before this."

"What's the matter, then, with turning back, Henri?" questioned Jimmy.

"Nothing the matter with 'turning,'" replied Henri, "but where is 'back'?"

Jimmy did not know, so he had nothing more to say on the subject.

The four at the moment were passing a seemingly endless row of tumble-down tenements. The

street was cobbled, or had been many years ago, and of sidewalks there was hardly a trace. At a far-away crossing ahead, an imitation of a lamp-post held up the kind of light one might expect from the fag-end of a candle. Behind, the darkness hung like a curtain.

"What a hold-up we would make," muttered Billy, as he tightened a belt worth something like a quarter of a million francs.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OUT OF A SPIDER'S WEB.

A BUNDLE of rags huddled in the doorway of one of the shaky old houses took unto itself life and height. In a gargoyle face snaky eyes balefully glistened at the sight of prey. The boys, who in a moment of indecision had stopped within earshot of this hideous, hidden thing, were about to resume their way through this wretched street, in the scant hope of finding some clew to their whereabouts under the feeble glow from the dimly distant lamp-post.

If there had ever been any gendarmes bold enough to regularly patrol this gruesome thoroughfare, these heroes were certainly not in evidence now. They must either have gone directly to war

or were on guard in some more prosperous locality.

In fact, this dilapidated neighborhood appeared to be generally deserted, for even of prowlers not a one up to the minute had given a sign of open movement in the long square.

There had been a lamplighter at the crossing, however, and that was something on which to hang a belief that there might be more of his kind further on.

"Say, Henri, I don't believe graveyards were mentioned in the directions Gilbert gave you."

"This is no joke, Jimmy, and you would never have seen the like in Paris if it wasn't for the war. To save my life, though, I can't imagine where all the people that belong here could have gone."

"There are some that we might not care to meet after dark," suggested Billy.

As they talked the boys were groping their way over the rough cobbles toward the one promise—meaning the lamp-post.

As they passed, single file, the blank front of a tenement where the crooked street curved inward, a crouching, cat-like something leaped from the rear upon Henri's shoulders, and clawing fingers sought his throat.

Henri wildly struggling to break the strangle hold of the wiry arms, and bewildered by the shock

of sudden assault, made no outcry, and Billy, next in line, did not realize for an instant or two what had happened to his comrade.

He felt a loose stone under his foot in the worn and broken pavement, in a second made a weapon of it, and poised alert to strike at the assailant of his chum. The streak of lamplight was so flickering and uncertain, and Henri being dragged further and further into the deepest shadow of the overhanging doorway—the web of the human spider—that Billy feared to risk a chance blow.

In the meantime, Jimmy and Reddy, warned by quick ears, had turned to face the shuffling charge of another creature of the night. There were more of the spiders, it seemed.

Billy found an opening to lay a sounding whack with the flat stone on the back of the writhing thing that hung upon the shoulders of his friend, and such was the force of the blow that Henri was freed for a moment from the horrid embrace.

He struck out blindly for himself and knocked the bundle of rags into a shrunken heap upon the pavement. The fallen creature uttered an acute, piercing sound, and slinking shapes responded, front and rear.

Reddy had used a French close-fighting trick, and planted a kick under the chin of the assailant with whom Jimmy and himself were contending, and the English boy made his count with a straight-

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from-the-shoulder right blow right on the beak of another onrushing shape.

"Together, boys! Together!"

Billy's fighting blood was up.

The four closed in, dashed forward several yards and backed against the door of the tenement just around the curve and where the street ran straight. This gave them the advantage of all the light the crossing lamp-post afforded. It was not much, but as Jimmy panted, it "helped some."

The house where the boys presented determined front to the now swarming human spiders was apparently of a far better class than the tumble-down hovels in the row around the curve—a contrast so often presented in the big cities. It rose to a height of four stories, of brick with stone trimmings. But every shutter in the front was tightly closed, and if occupied there was no light nor sound to indicate the fact.

Hemmed in by the menacing circle, the boys mounted heel by heel, never turning their heads, the stone steps of the house, rising to the wide and solid oak door with a brass knocker projecting from its panels.

Here was the last stand against the spider crew—no way of retreat.

The ragged gang were muttering ugly threats in the mixed language of the slums, and knives were

gripped in every hand. They were preparing for an overpowering rush upon their prey.

The boys knew that without other defense than their fists and their feet they had no show at all to stop an attack in force.

"Give the high note for help, Reddy."

Henri had heard the little Frenchman's "high note" in the hills of the Meuse, and it was a ringer.

Reddy set up a shriek in the still watches of the night that would have shamed a steam whistle.

"Secours! Secours!" (Help! Help!)

The immediate response was the cast of a knife, which whizzed close to the head of the shrieker and struck, shivering, in a door panel.

"I'd give something big for a gun," offered Billy when repeated yells for help in chorus had counted for nothing.

"Here they come!" shouted Henri.

"Let 'em think we're still in the ring."

Billy followed the words by heaving the paving stone, which he had retained for the finish, into the thick of the leaping spiders.

Pressed against the door, the boys gave up all hope of escaping the knives of their assailants.

Jimmy as a last duty kept the brass knocker thumping like a bass-drum.

Suddenly the door swung back, the boys fell into the opening like a cluster of ninepins scattered by a bowling ball, and as quickly the door slammed

shut in the faces of the baffled spiders. The boys heard the settling sound of heavy bolts in their sockets.

The hall into which the four had tumbled with so little ceremony was sable black to the sight, and with the settling of the bolts as silent as the grave.

"If this isn't about the rummest go yet, I don't know what," was Billy's stage whisper, as he rubbed a bruised elbow.

"If there's any next to this, lead me to it quick."

Jimmy was finding a deal of swift action since he joined issue with our Aviator Boys.

"You have cause to be on your knees to the Power above that you were delivered from that *canaille* (mob) outside. They would have left only your bones for the rats to know."

Thus were the boys solemnly addressed, in deep voice, by some person unseen, but near them, in the dark recesses of the hall.

The speaker was then revealed as he opened a door of a lighted room.

A man of almost imperial bearing, but white-haired and slightly bent with age, wearing a skull cap of velvet and a long study gown of the same material.

The room into which the boys were invited was typical of the scholar, the open books on the table,

under the shaded lamp, and the hundreds of volumes displayed in wall-cases.

Unknown to them, the boys stood in the presence of one of the most eminent philosophers of the age.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE FORTUNE DELIVERED.

"To one of those dictates of the mind for which there is sometimes no accounting," gravely stated the scholar, "you owe your lives, my young friends. Within these walls," indicating the room by a sweep of the hand, "I hear no sound. But I was moved to open yonder door, and the drumming of the knocker drew me to the front entrance. By the cries for help I knew someone was in distress. At all times the side streets about here are dangerous for night travel, and in these times there is no protection at all. You came a strange way, my boys."

"I had forgotten that it was not like it used to be," explained Henri, "and, too, I made a wrong turn, owing to the fact that the tower lights no longer serve to guide."

"Yes," continued the scholar, "the new element of warfare, the death-dealing airships, are responsible for that precaution. But in the morning my

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man, Armand, will set you right. He has gone up into the city for food supplies, and will not return to-night. Rest with me until then."

With the light of day, and it was a glorious sunlit day, the terrors of the past night folded their wings and disappeared.

Armand well fitted into such a day; he was a jolly fellow, all smiles and a waistband that extended a long way 'round. He could not for the life of him see, he declared, how the boys ever got into queer street, when the way (to him) was so straight to the big boulevards. He was full of a story how he had seen some great flying by noted aviators only the day before.

"It is wonderful, this flying, is it not?"

This question as much to promote his enthusiasm as anything else.

"How fine is that Gilbert," he rambled on, "and, to think, two young boys who also traveled the air just like the master."

"It just happens, my friend," said Henri, "that those two boys are standing close to you this blessed minute."

"Mon Dieu!" (Goodness me!)

Armand was a slave from that minute.

He must tell the great doctor in the library all about it. And the great doctor himself also had a second look at his young guests.

His was a kindly farewell, but he lifted a hand

when the boys tried to thank him for the boon of life he had conferred by his action of the night.

"In your prayers, my boys; in your prayers."

He turned and shut himself in with his books.

"You know of this location?"

Henri read to Armand from the address on the packet.

"Do I know my name? It is the grand boulevard. And the number—that, too, is easy."

Armand knew his Paris.

"March on!" Billy giving mock command.

Reddy's dream of Paris had first been realized in the form of a nightmare, but now it ranged to climax of delight—the Place de la Concorde, one of the largest and most elegant squares in Europe; the Egyptian obelisk; the magnificent Arc de Triomphe; the column to Napoleon I; the gardens of the Tuileries; the Louvre; the Art Palace; the Eiffel tower—just a few of the beauty spots noted in the passing on that first day when trouble was napping.

Armand was not only able to secure one cab, but had two at his bidding. A wonderful fellow was Armand, and much given to style.

"Here you are," he announced with a flourish to Henri when the cabs drew up before a handsome residence, with bronze lions crouching on the stone rests at each side of the entrance.

It was agreed that Henri should enter alone with

his precious packet, which delivered and his trust fulfilled, he would be at liberty to seek his mother and place in her own hands the Trouville fortune that had been so hardly won from the iron-bound chest in the depths of the now ruined château on the Meuse.

With heart beating high, head erect, and feeling the responsible charge of a messenger of state, Henri applied at the entrance for admission, and as promptly was admitted.

"Wish I had a picture of Henri receiving the medal for distinguished conduct when he gives up the packet."

Billy was back in his habit of expressing funny thoughts.

"It is not the house of the Premier," said Armand, shaking his head. "And the government is not sitting in Paris now. It is the private residence, I am sure."

"The private residence" is the French way of saying that you just don't know who does live there.

The minutes passed, and then the half hour.

"I'm glad," remarked Billy, "that these are not taxicabs. If they were we would have to lighten these belts to pay out."

"There he is now!" Jimmy had sighted Henri coming out of the house. Then:

"Why, he looks like he had just fallen off a Christmas tree."

Henri certainly did look as if some great joy had crowned him.

"Boys, that sealed packet was all a frame-up, arranged by Captain Johnson and that splendid gentleman at Calais. But it is simply the finest kind of a frame-up that you could imagine."

Henri reached out his hands to his comrades lolling in the cab.

"Come, climb out."

Then to Armand:

"My friend, I thank you for your good company and your good service. No—not a word."

Henri had slipped something into Armand's hand.

As the cabs rolled away, Henri marshaled his friends to the lion-guarded entrance of the house.

The aforesaid friends were almost bursting with curiosity.

"Give us the tip."

Billy prodded Henri with his elbow.

"You'll know soon enough," was the unsatisfactory reply.

Henri led the way into the drawing-room at the left of the entrance.

Standing there to greet them was a queenly tall gentlewoman with one of the most sadly sweet

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faces that the friends of Henri had ever looked upon.

In courtesy to the American and the English boy she addressed them in the language they understood, somewhat haltingly, it is true, but so graciously that they felt completely at their ease.

"So you are the brave ones who were with my boy in his every hour of peril. Would that I could say all that I feel."

It was Henri's mother!

"Now you see to whom the sealed packet led me."

Henri, drawn within his mother's arm, went on to tell of the surprise that met him when he first entered the house.

"I was expecting to be ushered into the presence of some stern-faced statesman, to hand him this packet with a bow; then to receive some word of approbation; and, then, to hurry out and hunt for mother.

"Instead of the 'stern-faced statesman' you now know whom I found. The packet was addressed to C. Giraud. My mother's maiden name was Clementine Giraud. I never thought of putting the two together; indeed, I never even noted the name—only the street and number. The oldest friend of our family at Calais in this important looking document, with its seals and ribbons, merely extended his compliments to Madame Trouville, and wished her joy of his messenger. And another

thing, it provided the captain with authority to land us at Havre. Wasn't that a dandy frame-up?"

Without another word each of the three boys faced about, unbuckled and pulled the treasure belt from beneath his blouse. Noting the action, Henri did likewise.

Then, gently guiding his mother to a chair, where he enthroned her as a queen, he laid the four belts in her lap.

The Trouville fortune had been saved!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE CALL OF THE AIR.

THE call of the air and action was again insistent. Our Aviator Boys grew restless with leisure, though it could be imagined that they had well earned a season of rest. Only the regret of Henri to leave his mother held them quiet even so long as a couple of weeks.

As to Jimmy, he was hankering for submarine service, and only Reddy had the Paris fever. He wanted to live out his dream.

What a gala occasion it was, then, the day that Captain Johnson and Josiah Freeman pressed with their brogans the pavement of Rue de Rivoli, and brought the news that another brand new sea-

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plane had slapped the face of the Seine two hours previous.

"The testing and exhibition work has grown a little too much for Uncle Josh and myself," was the captain's first after-dinner remark, when Madame Trouville had laughingly accorded him the privilege of smoking a cigarette. Henri and Billy did most of the laughing, however, when the captain really tackled the cigarette.

"As I was saying," went on the captain, "it is not in the pins that we can train two of the planes at the same time—and we have three now in the hangars at Dover that must have our warrant. Now I know," waxing confidential, "a pair of likely young men who could, with a reminder or two, fill the bill to perfection."

"Are they at present in France?"

Henri passing the wink to Billy.

"Oh, go on there, now," bluffed the captain.

"I know who you mean," clamored Jimmy, who at times was seriously English.

"You're a genius, my boy," put in Josh.

"Well, and out with it, the very boys are here, and guying their old friend for attempting suicide with a cigarette."

"Is it a go?"

"It is."

One voice from both Henri and Billy.

"I suppose it will have to be," sighed Madame Trouville.

"Don't worry, mother," Henri meekly submitting to the hair-stroking process, "we'll never get hurt if we keep off the ground."

"That's the way for an aviator to talk."

The captain's approval was hearty.

"It's in the morning, my boys, that the good airship leaves for Dover."

"And I'll get a lift, won't I?"

"You'll be set down in Dover, Jimmy, as sure as shooting. How about this youngster?" turning to Reddy.

"He has enlisted as guard for mother," explained Henri. "You can't tear him away from Paris."

"Good-night all," said the captain, making a move to go, after signal to Josh.

"But you're going to stay here to-night," urged Henri.

"No, thank you, my boy, Freeman and I have the 'plane' to look after, and we're not used to gilded beds, anyhow."

The truth of the matter was the captain and Josh had each a blackened briar pipe in his pocket that would have spoiled before morning.

Gilbert was among the crowd that had assembled at the river front the next morning to see the big airship make its getaway.

He was made an honored guest aboard the craft

and was greatly impressed with the tremendous power stored in the sea-plane.

"It is a big advance over anything I have ever seen in this construction, and, think of it, a ship within a ship."

The great airman had parting words with Henri and Billy:

"If you ever have the notion to fly for France, the wireless will be all too slow to bring me the word."

Ten minutes later the sea-plane was in full flight.

On this trip Captain Johnson and Engineer Freeman joined Jimmy in the passenger list. Billy was at the wheel and Henri at the motor end.

This was the order until the sea-plane finally took to its floats in Dover harbor.

"You have won your certificates as English air navigators. My word and my hand on it."

The captain spoke the word but he used his hand to slap the boys between the shoulders.

"Now, my young submarinist, I don't suppose you're going to let us teach you the business."

"I guess not, captain; I think I prefer the other game, though you've got a good one. I hate to quit the band, though, I tell you."

Jimmy looked for a minute like he was going to cry.

Henri and Billy made a show of being cheerful

to help Jimmy out, but it was not much of a success.

"Look alive, youngsters, you'll be running together in Dover right along."

The captain was a good sympathizer.

It was a long time thereafter, however, until the band was reunited, for the submarine boy went north in a torpedo boat destroyer, and our Aviator Boys went—but that's another story.

For several weeks the boys—only two of them now—listened to daily lectures from the captain and Freeman on the fine points of sea-planing.

"You must remember that you are going to be demonstrators and instructors—you're not just plain aviators any more," jollied the captain.

"When you go out alone in the cold world—aloft I mean—it is just as well to know just what to do in any weather. You may never have a chance to correct an error if it occurs five thousand feet from nowhere."

The boys evidently never forgot the captain's advice, for they lived to report all the mistakes they made.

Day after day the young airmen drilled as pilot and engineer, one time in one position, and one time in another, change about. Billy was regular as pilot, but the captain insisted that each could take the place of the other if emergency demanded.

"You are both qualified for *aéroplane* work, fore

and aft, but you must remember that a sea-plane is a bigger proposition, and I want you to be top-notchers. You get me?"

"We ought to be able to get you, captain, for this is the eighty-eighth time this week that you have said the same thing."

"All right, Billy, I'm stopping on the eighty-eighth. I think you'll both do."

The next day the boys were ordered to speed a sea-plane to London.

CHAPTER XL.

CAPTURED BY THE GERMANS.

ONE fine morning a great airship was discovered by Londoners floating over the Admiralty Arch. Now it was well known that guns had been mounted on the Admiralty Arch and on the roof of the War Office and several of the other larger buildings. The purpose of these guns was, of course, to repel hostile airships, about which London had become decidedly nervous.

These guns, however, had no occasion to bang at this aerial visitor, for it was known by those on the inside that this craft was not going to drop any bombs on the big town, but simply, on order, drop itself into the Thames, which in navi-

gable importance has been pronounced the greatest river in the world.

There was no doubt many a hysterical outburst regarding the big aircraft, but as nothing was blown up during its hovering period, there was consequently nothing to tell a policeman about.

This particular airship was conducted by our Aviator Boys—Billy Barry and Henri Trouville, or Henri Trouville and Billy Barry, as you please, according to who was at the wheel. It happened that Billy was working his regular trick as pilot on this London visit, and it was the first journey of importance that Henri and himself had been in sole command of a sea-plane—the largest of its kind.

It being a peaceful or commercial mission, there was no gunner in the bow, and no wireless operator sat in the center of the hull. Just Billy, fore, and Henri, aft. A small crew, but a crew trained to the minute.

The sea-plane, by signal, took to the river a short distance below London Bridge, in the dock region, where there was a total water area of some 600 acres.

On the occasion of the official visit to the sea-plane, as it floated near the docks, the inspecting officers, one and all, looked their astonishment upon the size of the crew, physically as well as in point of number.

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They looked at the craft and they looked at the boys and they looked at each other.

But when the crew took up the matter of detail and explanation, so thorough was the review they gave, that the officers ceased to wonder that these agents had been selected and entrusted with so much responsibility.

"This is about the only thing we do not have occasion to handle in this craft," said Billy, as he swiveled in all directions the machine gun in the bow.

"It's a handy little barker," observed one of the officers, who evidently knew all about guns.

Having completed their inspection and notes, a senior officer asked Billy if the crew went with the craft.

"Until it is sold, only," was Billy's prompt reply.

"Sorry," added the officer, "that we can't have you in the balance."

"We have traveled with three fighting flags since we have been flying around on this side of the ocean. It keeps us guessing what will be the next."

Henri was repeating what he had said to the captain just before leaving Dover.

"Have an eye out, or the Germans will get you yet," smilingly warned the senior officer.

"Who knows?" thought Billy.

The inspecting officers extended the freedom of the town to the young aviators, but it was necessary for them to return to Dover immediately, and having assurance that there had been nothing left undone connected with their mission, they took flight that afternoon, fixing their course from the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, the most conspicuous building in the metropolis.

When they reached Dover the captain had a story that a few days ago one of the destroyers had picked a German sea-plane out of the channel waters off Harwich, and it had been announced that it carried a freight of bombs, which were destroyed. The two men who formed its crew had blandly refused to give any information as to their plans.

"And while I can't swear to the story," averred the captain, "it gave me some worry about you. That kind of thing is pretty close."

"Never saw another thing in the air that could catch us," chirruped Billy.

"Don't you go to singing yourself into the idea that your ship is the only thing afloat, my boy. The Germans have a few good birds themselves."

The captain never figured out of reason.

Billy and Henri soon after had an experience above the Straits which convinced them that they were not the only speeders on the course, and confirmed the captain's opinion.

They had been flying through a North Sea mist and had just lifted to a clearing when Billy, peering sideways around the rising bow, saw the nose of another airship dart out from the sheltering mist. Sharp around Billy twisted the wheel to save collision, and endeavored to swing away from the intended attack of the German crew. Henri set the engines to their maximum power, but it was too late to avoid the shot from the fore gun of the opposing aircraft. There was a ripping and rending of rods and stays. Billy turned the planes for the fall, and down they went, their stricken craft helpless and beyond control.

Striking the water, the damaged seaplane settled like a bird with a broken wing.

The craft from which the shot had been fired dived down to complete a capture, and Billy and Henri, seeing the folly of attempting to resist a stalwart crew of four, promptly surrendered.

"You ought to be spanked and put to bed, you naughty boys," admonished the giant pilot of the German craft, when he noted the youth of his captives.

"But I guess you are smart enough," he admitted, "or you could not have made the play you did to get away. If it had not been for the gun we might have been fooled.

"Give them room there, Franz, maybe we can find places for them in the service."

So they climbed aboard the big German flyer without a word, fully determined, however, that they would not enter the service of Germany any more than they had entered the service of England and France; but very thankful to the good-natured Teutons who had rescued them after plunging them into the sea.

Captain Johnson watched for his flying boys in vain, and when at last the wrecked seaplane was towed in from the North Sea by an English vessel he gave them up for lost.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE BOYS PUT ON THE GRAY.

WHEN our Aviator Boys had been crowded into small space aboard the German seaplane, the big flyer cut through the mist at top speed. The capture of the young airmen had been but an incident; an accident, indeed. The German aviators were playing a bigger game. The boys heard the man called Franz jesting with his comrades about something that was going to spit fire like a volcano upon the English. Henri, in soft aside tones, let Billy know what it was all about, for Billy was as short in German as he was in the French language.

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The seaplane gunner (they called him Joseph), when the machine soared above the mist line, kept a sharp lookout through field glasses for some expected coming over the sea.

The boys could see, now that it was clearing to the north, the familiar trend of the English coast.

"They're up to something, that's sure," whispered Henri to Billy; "but what it is I haven't the least idea."

"I don't see any bombs in this craft, so it can't be anything like a blow-up from above," was Billy's whispered reply.

"Hold your mouths," growled the giant pilot.

Henri put a warning finger on his lips, glancing at Billy.

Gunner Joseph had evidently sighted the something for which he had been looking, for he made a rapid motion with a hand behind him, which the pilot evidently understood, for he immediately changed the direct northerly course of the seaplane sharply to the northeast.

Now visible to the naked eye was a fleet of cruisers, under full head of steam, and as they swiftly approached, the black cross in the flapping colors proclaimed the Kaiser's warships.

Billy and Henri were astounded at the sight. A German fleet within easy shelling distance of the Yorkshire coast!

One of the cruisers turned broadside, and from

the armored hull belched smoke and flame. Looking down upon the town of Hartlepool, the boys saw buildings crumple like houses of cards before a gale. Other vessels of the war fleet followed the leader in broadsides, and every iron cast seemed to find a mark and exacted toll of death and destruction. The Hartlepoons, Whitby, and Scarborough, places well known to the captive aviators, were under galling fire for an hour.

"They're shooting a mile, but look how true they get the range," remarked Billy in Henri's nearest ear.

"Look!" Henri pointed to the land batteries, now spouting fiery responses.

The German fleet was speeding northward—the hovering seaplane giving signal that the British patrolling squadron was hastening to cut off the invading vessels. Now favored by the gathering mist in the northerly flight, the daring raiders made their escape, but it could be seen that one of the lighter cruisers was afire. The land batteries had evidently scored a target or two.

A guttural command from the man in the seaplane's bow, and the machine was set in the wake of the fleet, and with full power in the motors.

"How much of the oil feed have we?"

The gunner's question was passed back from mouth to mouth to the engine man, for in the noises

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of the high speed nothing else could be heard beyond a foot or two.

"Hundred miles or so," was the answer of the engine man, passed forward.

"And nearly four hundred miles to Kiel," muttered the gunner. "But the fleet will put us right," he satisfied himself.

So they were bound for Kiel, and the boys did not know it until the seaplane settled among the German cruisers churning the waves in their race for home. With tanks refilled, the aircraft led the flight to Helgoland Bay.

While far in advance of the warships, the seaplane drew the fire of an English submarine that suddenly rose from the depths of the sea. A figure jumped from the turret of the underwater craft, turned a lever, and the gun that was folded into the back of the submarine swung muzzle upward. Once, twice, thrice, the gun cracked, but every shot a miss.

The third shot, however, was a near one, for Billy and Henri, interested spectators from the steel gallery, heard the ball hiss in the passing.

The lookout man of the seaplane trailed a signal to the fleet, but the submarine had disappeared before the cruisers had warily crossed the danger spot indicated by the seaplane.

"It would have been good-by if we had caught

that solid shot in the business section of this ship," was Billy's essay to the stolid pilot in front of him.

If the pilot heard or understood, he did not condescend to answer.

Some forty miles from the German naval stations in the neighborhood of Helgoland, the sea-plane's own gun was swiveled in the direction of a darting aëroplane scouting from some English warship, on the watch in these waters, but when the machine guns on one of the German cruisers, adapted to high-angle fire, broke loose on the British machine, it turned tail at a speed of seventy miles an hour.

Franz appeared to be greatly amused at this, and started a rapid flow of German humor about the high-dodging machines made somewhere else than in Germany.

Henri did not tell Billy what all the fun was about, for fear of bringing Billy to his feet with an argument as to where the best flying machines were made. But it would not have made any difference, for Franz and Billy were both assured of personal peace, in that neither could understand the other, though they talked until doomsday.

The boys had no fixed idea as to what fate had in store for them on German soil.

"I do hope that it won't be a military fortress for us," said Henri. "It would be mighty rough

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luck to be locked up at Cologne, or some other jail of a place."

"But you remember the pilot said when we were caught that they might find a place for us in the aviation service."

Billy found comfort in that memory.

"If I couldn't have anything else to do but carry oil around a hangar," asserted Henri, "it would sure be away ahead of looking at the stone walls of a fortress."

It was a happy moment, then, for our Aviator Boys when at Helgoland they were told by the giant pilot of the seaplane, whose name proved to be Carl, that they were booked, not now for Kiel, but Hamburg, which was the center of great aircraft activity.

"No dungeon deep for us," sang Billy, as he executed a clog step on the deck of the boat that later was taking them up the great river Elbe to one of the most remarkable cities of Germany.

"An aircraft town for sure," cried Henri, when, with Carl as kindly captor and guide, Billy and himself fared forth from the docks into the streets of Hamburg.

In an hour the boys saw eleven sheds, each said to contain a Zeppelin, and at the air camp all manner and makes of aëroplanes were housed.

It was here that Carl presented his charges to Heinrich Hume, aviation lieutenant, who conducted

the new recruits to a mammoth canvas house, where both aëroplanes and aëroplanists rest, when there is a chance to rest.

Billy had another pleasurable shock when Lieutenant Hume, in good old English, abruptly told Henri and himself to shake themselves out of their blue flannel outfits, and dive into a big camp chest filled with clothing of the lead color.

"Don't mind the blue," advised the lieutenant, "but it doesn't mate with the other moving pictures here."

"We don't have to be sworn in, or anything like that?" anxiously inquired Billy.

"You're more likely to be sworn at than in," laughed the lieutenant. "Now to the point: Do you know enough about aëroplanes to roll one with the right end foremost? Carl says you kids were working an armored seaplane when they plugged you, but Carl is sometimes inclined to draw the long bow about adventures in which he has figured."

Billy was inclined to hump his back at this, but wisely concluded to let action stand as the proof.

When Billy and Henri went to work among the 'planes, the apprentices under training by Lieutenant Hume looked like the oft-quoted thirty cents. One or two of them even looked daggers at the newcomers.

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At the end of the first day of the boys' service test, the lieutenant said to himself:

"Carl has stumbled against the real thing, for once, at least."

CHAPTER XLII.

FOUGHT TO THE FINISH.

THE boys awaited patiently an invitation from the lieutenant to exhibit their skill by upper-air exercise in one of the Taubes—the Germans called their military monoplanes doves—but that officer did not seem then inclined to favor one of the aviation field helpers above another.

A shock-headed boy, hailed as Max, who had been an ironworker in Bremen, showed a decided disposition to "pick upon" Henri and Billy in their daily occupation of valeting the aircraft.

He was nursing a jealous spirit, aroused by a chance word of praise bestowed upon our Aviator Boys by Lieutenant Hume, and tried to enlist the sympathy of the other employees of the hangars in common cause against the "fancy fellows," as he persisted in calling the newcomers. But as a rule they were a good-natured lot, and not inclined to worry about anything except a food shortage at meal time.

Max, before our boys had arrived, had claimed rank as first among those serving the more noted aviators, who were constantly coming and going.

The climax of wrath with Max came when Ingold, the great aviator, starting for the war zone, dispensed with his clumsy services and accepted those of Billy and Henri in overhauling a double-decker, or biplane, that was to be used in active military movement.

"You'll get a cracked head for this," hissed Max, when the lieutenant and the big airman had passed out of hearing.

Billy, to whom the threat was addressed, did not understand the words, but he guessed from the attitude of the threatener that something ugly was intended.

So Billy, who never counted fear a burden worth the bother, simply grinned, turned, and went on with his work of tuning the biplane.

Henri, tinkering at the motor end of the machine, looked up just in time to see Max, wrench in hand, poised to strike at the back of Billy's head.

"Look out, Billy!"

The warning cry from Henri saved Billy from a stunning blow on the head, but he caught the jolt from the wrench on his right shoulder, as he swiftly faced about.

With a good left uninjured, however, Billy gave Max a short-arm jab in the neck, at the chin, that

tumbled the would-be slugger upon the packed earth floor of the hangar.

"Good arm!" exclaimed Henri. "But how about the other?"

With the question, Henri gently worked his comrade's right arm up and down to see if there was any hitch in the shoulder where the wrench had landed.

"Not a chance for a surgeon," assured Billy. "Just a little numb—that's all."

Max slowly gathered himself up from the ground, with a hand on his jaw, and a vicious glitter in his eyes.

"It will be to the finish next time."

His tone was full of menace.

"What's he saying?" inquired Billy.

Henri translated.

"Tell him," said Billy, "that the day and the hour is his very own to name, so long as he comes in the front way."

Henri did not comply with this request, but hooked arms with Billy, and walked him away.

This was the glove in the ring that led to one of the liveliest lightweight come-togethers that the aviation camp boys had ever witnessed.

Neither Henri nor Billy had mentioned the wrench incident to the lieutenant. They were too self-reliant for that kind of business. There was

nothing, either, to induce Max to relate his sorry part in the hangar scrap.

It was not until several days later that Henri was approached by a lad with the name handle of Jacob. The latter was apparently not a willing messenger.

"Max wants a fight with your friend," he explained, "and if it was me he couldn't get it, for he's a tricky one and as strong as a bull. But I just had to do this to get rid of him."

"You tell that fellow that we don't want anything to do with him," was Henri's message to the challenger.

The next morning, while many of the machines were aloft in practice and test flights, and the aviation helpers were grouped at the far end of the parade ground, Max deliberately called Billy an unbearable name, and followed the insult with a ringing slap on the cheek of the boy from Bangor.

The fat was in the fire!

Instantly the circle widened, and in the center two husky youngsters went at it hammer and tongs.

There were no gloves, no seconds, and no referee with rules up his sleeve.

Billy ruled a strong favorite, but Henri alone made a noise about it, for the others were reluctant to take a chance of offending Max, unless they were assured in advance that he was going to be thoroughly whipped.

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It certainly did not appear that way in the opening of the bout, for Max had gashed Billy's forehead with a full knuckle blow, and also landed a rib-cracker on the latter's body.

Billy now sparred warily, seeking time to recover from the body blow, which had proved the most serious, though the bleeding bruise on the forehead made the most show of injury.

He kept his antagonist on the move, at the same time keeping out of range of the fists swinging like windmills. Max had the strength, and a certain skill as a rough-and-tumble fighter, but he also had too much flesh on his bones, and little science as a boxer.

Billy was as clean built as a greyhound, muscled like a young gladiator, and learned where to hit and how to hit under an old master of the craft in Boston.

"Take your time, Billy," encouraged Henri, "he's a beef, and you'll get him all right."

Henri's blood was running warm at the sight of his chum's bruised face, and he would have violently resented any attempt to interfere in what he firmly believed would result in payment in full by the loose fighter who had provoked the battle and inflicted first injury.

Max began to exhibit distress from his exertions, which had ceased to count since the opening onslaught. He struck hard, but he struck at random.

Enraged at the useless and wearing practice of hitting at something where it was not, the panting slugger made the break to get under Billy's guard and clinch. It was a grievous error for him.

Billy, keen-eyed, caught him coming, and nothing but daylight between a ready fist and the knock-out point of a square chin.

Biff! There was everything behind that blow in the way of steam.

The Bremen lad had been coming too fast for the impact to hurl him backward. He simply sagged at the knees, and dropped in a heap.

The fight was over, but not all of the trouble. Billy rushed to the side of his fallen foe, who, showing the whites of his eyes and rattling the breath in his throat, was viewed with alarm by the witnesses of the exciting mill.

"Give him air," hoarsely urged the victor to the crowding white faces.

Henri ran to a platform nearby where water buckets were placed, and the chums gave all of the first aid in their experience to the vanquished.

Max, directly, recovered consciousness, and raised his head and dazedly looked about him. Finding that his head was pillowed in Billy's lap, Max struggled to free himself from the sheltering embrace of the arm that put him down and out.

Recovering speech, the way he expressed his cha-

grin and humiliation was enough to make the air blue.

Jacob told him that he ought to be satisfied now, and Billy offered truce by extended hand. Max, however, was far from the mood that finds any consolation in defeat.

"Here comes the lieutenant," announced Henri; "we'd better skip, Billy, and patch up that face of yours before we are put on the question rack."

All the boys scattered in pairs, or several more together, except Max, and he walked alone, brooding, sullen, and implacable.

Billy had been washed clean of blood and holding a washer-plate of cold steel against the bump on his forehead, when Jacob came into the hangar with the information that the lieutenant had been calling for his pair of late recruits, and wanted them forthwith.

"He's heard about the fight," was Henri's first surmise.

"Do I look like a pug?" Billy inquired, lifting the plate from the bruised spot.

"You will likely go into training on bread and water," gloomily predicted Henri.

"Oh, quit croaking," advised Billy. "Come ahead, and we'll take the medicine, whatever it is."

The lieutenant was framed in the flaps of his canvas house when the boys presented themselves for supposed correction.

The officer calmly inspected the recruits through the smoke that wreathed around the bowl of his meerschaum.

CHAPTER XLIII.

SETTING OF A DEATH TRAP.

"I'VE been getting a line on you."

When the lieutenant delivered himself thusly the boys were sure and positive that he had all the details of the fight, and wonder only was left as to how serious a breach of discipline the officer would consider a battering match on the parade ground.

What was their surprise, then, when the lieutenant went on to say, aiming the stem of his meerschaum at a group of officers—high officers apparently—which at the moment made a ground circle of slim, polished boots about a Zeppelin taking in its flying cargo of gas:

"Colonel Muller, over there, has just been telling me the story of a couple of boys he met in America who beat anything of the age in the matter of expert flying. I mentioned that the crew of one of our seaplanes had picked up a pair of kids who, they claimed, were navigating alone in an airship big enough to keep the best of them guessing. The colonel has expressed a wish to look you over. He's great for aviation."

"Gee! I believe that this Muller was with Colonel McCready when we made that record flight in Texas. You remember, the tall one, with the monocle, and hair and mustache the color of a ten-dollar gold piece."

The lieutenant had walked down the canvas row to ascertain the further wishes of the colonel, giving Billy this chance to search the memories of his chum and himself.

"Come to think of it," replied Henri, "I do recall seeing a man like that, but it is no sure shot that it is the same one."

"We'll soon know, anyhow."

Billy saw the lieutenant raise a beckoning finger, and the boys hurried to present themselves.

Facing Colonel Muller, the boys, in their ill-fitting gray tunics and rawhide boots, hardly hoped for recognition. They knew their man in an instant.

The colonel had a long memory, too, for he immediately exclaimed:

"Hello there, Boy Aviators, as Colonel 'Mac' called you; you're a long way from home, I see."

It was a matter of pride and satisfaction to the boys that the big soldier could place them, even in the disguise of an aviation camp outfit.

Turning to the lieutenant, the colonel inquired: "Have you put these youngsters through the paces yet?"

"No, colonel," replied the lieutenant, "they have been working in the oil-can brigade chiefly, but from the way they handle the parts I suspected they were out of the apprentice class."

"Why, they are builders as well as demonstrators," explained the colonel. "Teach them anything about aircraft? I guess not."

By this time all of the officers were sizing up the objects of the colonel's unusual comment.

The helpers, with open mouths, had gathered at a respectful distance, but near enough to hear what was going on, and marveled that the great colonel should condescend to familiar terms with boys whom they claimed as of their class and number. Max, the malignant, was in the front row, and none the happier for the new honors conferred upon the fellow-workers whose very presence galled him.

"Trim them up a bit," said the colonel to the lieutenant, pointing to the slop-chest clothing in which the boys were attired, "and send them over to headquarters this evening."

"You've made a ten strike," observed the lieutenant, as he sent the boys to a military clothier in the town with a written rush order.

"We could register from Annapolis now and get across with it," laughed Billy, as they awaited the pleasure of an orderly at headquarters. The boys had been "trimmed up a bit," and neatly garbed in gray looked as fine as middies on parade.

"Ah, here you are; come in," invited the colonel. "Gentlemen," turning to others in the room, "here are the young airmen about whom I was talking. This aviation business, I confess, is a hobby with me. Why, just think of boys this age not only able to completely assemble one of these wonderful machines, but to drive them, under ordinary circumstances, so expertly that safety aloft is about as equally assured as in a railway journey.

"Behold one of the natural enemies of your craft," continued the colonel, directing the boys' attention to a smart-looking young soldier, a lean, keen fellow, with captain's straps, lounging on a sofa nearby. "He's a fellow who turns balloon cannon loose on about every plane that hasn't a black cross on its yellow stomach. That's one of the reasons why a military aviator would have as much chance of getting life insurance at Lloyd's as would a snowball of holding together in the furnace room of a cruiser."

"We've seen some of the steel noses turned up at us," volunteered Billy.

"Don't believe they were exactly of my kind," interposed the gunman on the lounge. "These are new ones, just out, and they reach further than any other make. We can haul them around at the tail of an automobile at the speed of about sixty miles an hour. Come along when we pull out of here

and I'll show you what a spin of a wheel will do in aiming the little daisy on the steel truck."

"Don't let him ever catch you asleep on your perch," joked the colonel, "or there will be a bird funeral in the aviation family."

When the lieutenant passed the word among the helpers to hustle the aëroplane shipment, it was noticeable that Billy and Henri served no longer in the pulling and hauling end of the job. They were held at the elbow of the directing force, and vested with the power to give orders in the hangar instead of taking them. This change of class met with no rebellion among the apprentices, for they reckoned that the newcomers must be of extraordinary ability to be so quickly advanced, and, further, it was soon recognized that even the lieutenant had no aircraft knowledge superior to his young assistants.

"I believe," acknowledged this officer, "that I have you beaten in only one branch of the profession, the Zeppelin branch, I mean, and that, I suppose, is only due to the fact that this invention is exclusively German."

"That's mighty kind of you to say this," returned Henri, "but Billy and I feel that you can yet set us straight on a good many points in these foreign planes, and we would be glad to have a chance to dig into Zeppelin instruction."

"I don't know about that last," was the uncertain answer of the lieutenant.

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"What's the matter with Max, I wonder," observed Henri, as the last crate of the shipment was rolled down to the docks; "he must be raising a pair of wings on his shoulders."

"If you had seen the side glance he gave me to-day, you would leave the wings out of your calculations."

Billy felt that Max quiet was more to be feared than Max boisterous.

"Sorry to see Colonel Muller leave, I tell you."

"So was I, Henri; but he said that only a bullet would prevent our meeting again."

The colonel had also told Billy that Henri and himself had only entered the side door of Germany, and there was a big chance of their seeing more of the country.

Among the several satisfactory results of their reunion with the colonel, one bobbed up that very afternoon, when Lieutenant Hume stated that a new lot of machines were to be set up and jockeyed, and, as nearly all of the aviators had gone with the last shipment, the boys could take a turn in the air every day, if they so desired.

"If they desired!" Did thirsty ducks need a second invitation to visit a pond?

As there were no double-deckers, or biplanes, in the fresh invoice, Billy and Henri were to work separately in the war monoplanes, those with the

birdlike wings and curved tail rudder piece, the smaller birds that whirred and whined.

Two of these machines had been carefully groomed and set in order for an early morning flight, and the boys retired with all the assurance in the world that they could give the helpers such a practical illustration of scientific planing that there would remain no doubt in the minds of these groundlings as to the merit and right of the newcomers' promotion.

Silence reigned in the house of canvas, and no hostiles to guard against, sentinels were not stationed, and only occasional inspection required during the night.

It was midnight. Stealthy hands parted the flaps of the entrance to the big tent, and a stocky figure, but light-footed, darted across the floor of hardened clay to the stalls where the monoplanes were set for motion.

An electric light tube flashed into a box of tools, and the intruder was speedily operating with a chisel at the propeller end of the monoplane, in which was placed the repair kit, numbered 16—charged in the hangar record to one Billy Barry.

The furtive visitor, apparently satisfied that he had accomplished his purpose, replaced the chisel and closed the tool box. He took the further precaution of picking up every chip or shaving that had dropped during the use of the chisel edge.

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Then, with a final sweep of the electric tube, the stocky shape flitted through the canvas door into outer darkness.

Would that there was some warning word in dreamland to sound in the ear of sleeping Billy Barry. An assassin hand had set a death trap with cunning intent to conceal the peril therein until a moment too late to baffle the devilish design!

CHAPTER XLIV.

A LIFE IN THE BALANCE.

BILLY lifted a ruddy face from a bucket of ice-cold water, in which he had been taking a waking dip, and then yanked Henri by the heels out of a warm blanket nest.

"Get up, lazybones, and let's be scraping the sky. It's a good six o'clock, and the cook's all in a fume about the breakfast getting cold."

Henri caught the spirit of his companion, and both gave way to joyful anticipation of a twenty-mile dash in a pair of monoplanes.

They attempted to waltz with the cook, but neither could reach even a quarter way around the waist of this rotund Wilhelm, and if the latter's legs had not been so much shorter than his waist-

band it is likely that the skylarkers would have received several jars from a ham-like foot.

Capering like colts, the boys headed for the hangar, and with the assistance of Jacob and another helper, early on the ground, the machines were rolled out to make their buzzing start for high places.

When Billy had removed kit number 16 from his monoplane he hopped into his seat on the frame. Henri was already settled for flight.

The run-off, however, was postponed for a minute or two so that the aëroplanists could watch the rise of a Zeppelin directly in front of them.

"Let 'er go," sang Billy, and both monoplanes got away together.

The Zeppelin had just swung around in the great arc of a circle, and the boys in the monoplanes were sailing immediately above the great cylinder. Henri had just turned a swift glance at his companion aviator, with intent of setting the direction of flight, when—and the horror of it—Billy's machine suddenly stopped in midair, wobbling like a cradle, and before the young aviator's desperate attempt to retain control could prevail the machine turned upside down, and the boy from Bangor hung by the knees from the tumbling frame.

Henri would have cried aloud in agony of spirit—but he was as one stricken dumb. He almost

spelled death for himself by letting go of the controls of his machine.

But what a sight for his staring eyes!

The falling monoplane had struck athwart the aluminum envelope of the Zeppelin, and, though the bigger craft trembled from stem to stern with the shock, it held its way, buoyed up by the gas chambers on each side of the cylinder. Billy soon rested safely on one of the platforms, cheered by members of a rejoicing crew.

Henri found his voice again, and, shouting like a madman, he sent his monoplane darting toward the earth, and if he failed to land in his usual beautifully precise way he was there when the Zeppelin brought back to him that "dear old Billy."

The lieutenant, hastily responding to summons, found his two expert aviators hugging one another, and the crew of the Zeppelin critically inspecting a damaged monoplane grounded between its mate and the big ship.

"What's the matter here?" nervously demanded the lieutenant.

"It looks like foul play is the matter," shortly responded the chief officer of the Zeppelin. He was not a member of Lieutenant Hume's command.

"You're right," exclaimed the lieutenant with an oath, as he knelt to more closely inspect the chiseled propeller and the spiked rudder. Turning to Billy, and in severe manner:

"Do you always hold your life so lightly as to start an air machine without previous inspection?"

"That machine, sir, was as right as could be when we left it last night. Indeed, sir, it was in elegant shape."

"No question but what some devil in human form planned your death, and if I get the dastard it will be a yardarm in the harbor for him, and no waste of time and lead."

The lieutenant was aroused, and when a calm like his was rudely broken it meant woe for the object of his wrath.

Told of the manner in which Billy had been saved, the anger of the officer relaxed its force for the moment, when he solemnly said:

"Of the like I have never known; it is beyond me."

Investigation, vigorously pushed, soon developed a significant fact—the youth to whom kit 9 was charged failed to respond at roll call. Max was missing.

Jacob then blurted out the whole story of the fight, and all that had preceded and followed it.

"I want to say right here and now," was the stern declaration of the lieutenant, "that the next offender in this camp will get his billet to Cologne, where they play checkers with their noses on iron bars. As for Max, if he is captured, you will see

an example made that will not rub out of your memories for many a day."

With that the speaker's jaws set like a clamp.

When Billy petitioned for the job of making another monoplane test the very next day, the lieutenant was astonished.

"You certainly ought to take something for that nerve of yours, boy."

"But, sir, it's all in the game," argued Billy; "it's our business, and we can't quit for every close call."

"See me to-morrow; besides, Herr Roque wants to have a talk with you. Here he is now."

The lieutenant presented Billy to a mild-looking man in citizen's attire, and who peered at the boy through horn-bound spectacles. This noted secret agent was the picture to-day of a well-to-do merchant in the lesser lines of trade. What his appearance would indicate to-morrow is another thing. He was a lightning change artist, according to repute.

"Glad to meet you, young sir," was his bland address, in perfect English.

"Same to you, sir," Billy politely replied, all the time wondering what was coming.

"I just came over from the city to take up a little supply contract with the officers here, and I learned of your narrow escape from death. It was wonderful, miraculous. I congratulate you."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

"Ah, no need of thanks, young sir. I highly appreciate the favor of meeting you.

"Let us be seated, if you please. I am not so young as I used to be. Good. Now we can chat in comfort. I am very fond of the air sport, I assure you. Isn't it queer that often what we admire the most we know the least about? Art, for instance—and flying, too, on little boards, without the lifting power of gas. Wonderful!"

"What's he driving at?" thought Billy. Then aloud: "I expect I had better not take up any more of your time, sir, as you are here on business."

"I wish you knew just how dull it was in Hamburg now. Business is, oh, so quiet. And I so like to talk to bright young men. It just occurred to me that you and your young friend would like to take a little voyage with me, in a trading vessel that I own. Of course, in these sad times of war a sea voyage is not the popular choice for recreation, but just a brief cruise in known waters isn't at all bad for the nerves. The regularly enlisted young men, it seems, cannot be spared, and I have spoken to the lieutenant about borrowing his young visitors for a week or two, promising them both a good time, and just that spice of adventure which lads of your caliber seem to require."

"It just occurred" also to Billy that it was more than passing strange, in the first place, that there

should be so much personal interest manifested in the affairs of Henri and himself, and, secondly, how it was that an ordinary tradesman could have such a "pull" with military authority. The civilian here, as a rule, did not count in high figures alongside of a uniform.

This was evidently an exceptional case, for not only did the lieutenant approve of Herr Roque's proposition and invitation, but that officer had unbent to the extent of entertaining Henri, on the side, and telling him that Billy and himself were lucky in attracting the interest of this kindly merchant.

So it proved no longer a matter of open consent on the part of the boys; it was simply a go, when the lieutenant commanded.

"I don't know why I was selected as the dummy for all that beating around the bush," observed Billy, when the boys tumbled into their bunks that night.

"You oughtn't to kick because you are the prominent member of the firm," teased Henri.

"Well, we won't know what it is until we get to it, that's one thing sure," yawned Billy.

They were booked, if they only knew it, to discover that "Herr Roque" was a man of many moods, as well as make-ups.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE WAYS OF THE SECRET SERVICE.

"THAT doesn't look like a pirate craft, anyhow."

The boys were on the docks bright and early the next morning, and were looking at the vessel in which they were expected to embark within the next hour for the trip down the Elbe to the sea.

As Billy had put it, the ship they were viewing was neither "low, long, nor rakish." Herr Roque had not deceived them on that point, at least. It was a "trading vessel." All of the crew in sight were of the roustabout class, except the captain, who was somewhat of a dandy, with a glazed cap, high collar, military blouse, and corduroy trousers.

"Hi, there!" he called to the boys in high-pitched German, "are you from Herr Roque?"

Henri advised in loud tone that such was the fact.

"Come aboard, then," invited the boss of the deck.

The boys made short work of the rickety gang-board, and, aboard, cast an eye about for their host.

The captain said something in his way of speaking that meant "you'll see him later."

It was some time later—at the mouth of the Elbe, and late at night.

Before this happened, the boys, not experienced

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as seamen, were surprised to the limit at the ready transformation of that "trade vessel." Tarpaulin coverings removed, like magic unfolding, revealed a funnel, gunbeds, and guns in them, of the kind to raise the mischief with a hull at short range; spars were stripped of clumsy sails, and the craft generally departed from the peaceful classification in which it cleared from Hamburg.

"Oh, you pleasure trip!" Billy merrily commented.

"You surely didn't swallow that story?"

"You know I didn't, Henri," returned Billy. "When is a dummy not a dummy? Answer: When someone thinks he is what he isn't. How's that, Henri?"

"As good grammar as could be expected on a trick ship," acknowledged Henri.

The sailors even changed their faces with their clothes, their jaws fitting as tightly as their sea-going outfits, and, as far as the captain himself, he was no longer set up in landscape style. Straight as a poker he stood on the newly discovered bridge like an image of lead.

"Wouldn't jar me if Herr Roque showed up with horns on his forehead instead of in spectacle trimming."

Billy was preparing for the next fall of the wand.

While the boys were watching the hoist of the anchor, following a curt command from the officer

on the bridge, and a distant chime was proclaiming the midnight hour, Billy was made aware that someone, not of the regular crew, was standing at his elbow.

The voice was that of Herr Roque, but the speaker could never for a single moment be materially taken for the late elderly spectacled merchant.

"How now, young sirs; is it well with you?"

Billy and Henri stared at the face showing in the pale gleam of a spar light. Clean-shaven, thin-lipped, hard-eyed, not a trace of the benevolent cast of countenance worn by the bland tradesman.

The line of talk was there, but not another line of the other assumed character.

"Is—it—really—Herr Roque?" stammered Billy.

"At your service, young sirs."

"It all works like a play," put in Henri.

"I hope not a tragedy, young sirs."

"Would you mind cutting out the 'young sirs'?"

Billy was getting nettled at this mockery.

"No offense intended, I assure you."

For reasons of his own, the secret agent had no desire to blunt the edge of his selected tools in useless manner.

Indeed, he kept the boys on velvet, so to speak, for the first two days at sea.

Then his mood changed with lack of leisure mo-

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ments. He was constantly on the alert and abrupt in word and action.

There was a sailor constantly in the crosstrees, sweeping the watery expanse with powerful glasses. The gunners were standing, watch about, in readiness for any emergency.

As a completing touch to this deck setting a runway had been rigged and the boys for the first time realized the part they were expected to play. There was a pair of monoplanes under cover, a waspish pair, of exquisite make and finish.

"Get to them and get them in shape," sternly ordered Roque, "as if your lives depended on it—and" (grimly) "I guess they do."

In this assignment Billy and Henri took the star rôles.

"Smoke ahead," sang out the man up the mast.

"Whereaway?" demanded the captain.

"South by southeast," floated back from the mast-head.

"Get that?" The captain to the wheelman.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Hold her hard, then."

Signal to the engine room: "Slow speed."

Roque summoned the boys with imperious motion.

"Take the air; bring signal red, if English warship; signal white, if French cruiser; and signal black, if channel steamer. Get away!"

Four sailors manned the runway—first Billy shot the chute; then Henri, a moment later. A clean leap, and off they went.

The steamer they left logged lazily, drifting, waiting.

The aviators guided the flight toward the thin spiral of smoke penciling a point on the horizon. The air was as clear as a bell.

With no fixed notion of what purpose they were serving, the aviators exulted only in the joy of air conquest. The machines were keyed up like a watch—that is, perfection—and could be directed to a hairline.

The smoke spiral was rope-sized, then body-round, then a column.

The aviators looked down for a fleeting moment on one of the large channel steamers, somewhat out of its course, and instantly whirled about, flying like the homing pigeon, and exactly as the compass set the lines.

Each monoplane trailed a black streamer.

The sailor at the masthead caught the color in his glasses.

And drawing nearer the aviators caught their signal to descend.

It is a nice piece of work to drop an aëroplane upon the deck of a wave-rocked ship, and in this instance it was a nice piece of work nicely done.

There was a gleam of approbation in the cold

gray eyes of Roque, when the machines floated in and nested without strain or creak upon the fore-deck.

"I see that I sized you about right," he said, and it could be plainly inferred that he accepted the exhibit largely as a vindication of his own judgment.

True for Roque, for it had been said that he seldom erred in matters of this kind.

It was also evident that the color of the signal streamer was the one to his liking, for, with a great flurry of orders, the vessel, under full head of steam, hastened its hunt for the big channel boat, as located by the aviators.

As they ran in course, the channel steamer was crossing the line followed by the fast-approaching German vessel. The latter, moving free, could easily overhaul the cargo-laden ship, straightway, and more surely in crossway.

The overhauling was soon accomplished, and the unarmed channel boat hove to, to the tune of a round shot across her bow.

Billy and Henri were not included in the boarding party. They had served their turn, and beyond that were not expected to serve.

They could not imagine what Roque had in mind when all hands were hustling in the transfer of numerous canvas rolls to the German deck, all labeled "music machines." They well knew of the Teuton

fondness for music, but here was a whole lot of trouble and expense to get what might have been easily and cheaply purchased in Hamburg.

Roque made no attempt to take prisoners or other plunder from the nonresisting commercial carrier.

The "music machines" were all he wanted, and, with a deck full of them, the German vessel broke its grapples and steamed away.

It never dawned upon the boys that the labels were not the true index of contents, until one of the parcels was broken open for inspection.

The wrappings enclosed rifles — hundreds of them.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE FACE IN THE MIRROR.

"THIS man Roque must have a long reach to have known about that consignment of guns, how and when they were to be shipped, and make the strike he did within three days."

Billy was discussing with Henri some of the remarkable features of the recent voyage, as the steamer came in sight of Helgoland Bay, on the return trip.

"He's a magician, that's what he is," maintained Billy. "Did you ever see the beat of the way he unmasked this ship?"

"And himself," added Henri.

At the mouth of the Elbe, the tarpaulins again shrouded the warlike fixings that had been revealed by their removal, and it was the familiar "trading vessel," dandy captain, roustabouts, and all, that went in with the tide.

"Home again, young sirs."

The oily tradesman once more, horn spectacles, bland address, and benevolent smile—Herr Roque, the peaceful merchant with a liking for bright young men and pleasure trips when business was dull.

"We'll have a little run up to Kiel by the way of the great canal, a nice jaunt to complete our vacation, young sirs."

Herr Roque was the picture of innocence, as he genially waved his hand to a party of harbor officials, passing near in a launch. He took snuff from a silver box and extended the compliment of giving the captain a chance to take a pinch.

It was noticeable, however, that the slightest word from the kind "merchant" commanded the instant respect and attention of those about him.

"It would make us all very happy, my dear captain, if you could spare the time to arrange our ship to Kiel. Herr Raum is very anxious to get the goods. He has orders from Berlin to fill."

This comedy was for the sole benefit of the assemblage on the docks.

The canvas rolls with the rifles inside were already on the way to Kiel, and the boxes to which Roque was pointing were simply ship supplies.

Billy and Henri were not aware that they had been accorded an unusual privilege when they looked upon the real Roque during the hunt for the channel steamer.

Kiel, in contrast to Hamburg, seethed with activity, the streets swarming with sailors and marines, while in the harbor dispatch boats dashed hither and thither.

Herr Roque kept Billy and Henri close to his elbow, and forbade their engaging in conversation with any stranger, unless duly presented by him. The English tongue was not at all popular in Kiel at this time. Henri, to be sure, could rattle off German like a native, but it was deemed best that he also become a mute like his companion.

Notwithstanding all this precaution, the boys were fated to have their usual adventure before quitting this lively town. They never would stand hitched! Herr Roque had some special business in the town, no doubt concerning the "music boxes," and he "planted" his young charges in a hotel near the docks, with a word to the landlord to give them a look over now and then.

"I don't propose to stick around this coffee house all day," rebelled Billy, "when there is so much go-

ing on outside. Let's join that crowd piking at the harbor. Something's doing there."

Henri was in the same humor, and the pair mixed with the mentioned curious crowd.

The attraction was three huge liners transformed by a coat of gray paint and yellow funnels.

The boys pushed their way to the front rank of the viewers, and then a little ahead of what appeared to be the limit of approach.

There was a murmur from the crowd. It was known that soldiers aboard were not allowed to leave these particular ships, popularly believed to be transports destined for the invasion of England, and an equally stern rule that nobody was allowed to come near them.

Of course, Billy and Henri had no knowledge of the rule, and they crossed the deadline as care-free as clams.

Then something dropped. It was a heavy hand on the shoulder of Henri, a few feet in advance of his chum. Somebody set a vise-like grip on Billy's wrist. A bevy of graybacks fluttered around them. They had committed the unpardonable sin of ignoring a military order, and also they were unpardonably foreign to the soil. They were English, until they proved themselves something else.

A lane opened in the muttering crowd, and through it marched the file of soldiers, with the

suspects sandwiched between the leader and the next in line.

At the city hail the soldiers and the suspects abruptly deserted the lengthy street procession behind them, and the prisoners were presented without further ceremony to the bulky occupant of a revolving chair within a railed enclosure.

"What have we here?" sharply questioned the man behind the railing.

The soldier spokesman briefly related the cause of the arrest.

"Lock them up." This order completed the first hearing.

Billy and Henri a few minutes later perched themselves on a sack mattress filled with straw, in a prison cell.

"'In the prison cell I sit,' " chanted Billy.

"Don't be a chump," complained Henri. "This is a serious matter, I tell you."

"What's the use of crying, old top, when you can sing?"

Billy was prescribing a tonic for his partner.

"There is just one man who can get us out of this scrape," stated Henri, "and he wears horn spectacles."

"It won't take that man long to find us; he's a smooth one."

Billy had the utmost confidence in Herr Roque's

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ability as a sleuth since the affair of the "music boxes."

Footfalls sounded in the long corridor outside.

"Maybe that's him now," was Henri's eager expression, as he hastened to the grated door of the cell.

But the footfalls did not belong to Roque. The man at the door was only a burly guard who handed in two tins of hot coffee and a dangling roll of raw sausages.

"Say, major," pleaded Henri in German, "we've got a good friend uptown that knows all about us—can't we get word to him?"

Even the rank of "major" did not appeal to the jailer, for he only grunted, and turned on his heel.

"Looks like a night of it, Henri."

"And there will be a morning of it, too," predicted Henri.

"'We won't go home until morning,'" warbled Billy.

"Oh, what's the use? You have quit being human."

Failing to turn his friend from his waggish way, Henri rolled over on the straw mattress and went to sleep. Billy followed suit.

They were awakened by the clang of a bolt, and sprang to sitting position, rubbing their eyes.

The jailer, with a lantern swung to his arm like a railway conductor, was framed in the cell door.

A pair of horn spectacles glistened over his shoulder.

"Glory be! It's Herr Roque!"

Billy was not bluffing now. He was glad enough to see this able protector.

Herr Roque did not appear to be very amiable. He was not accustomed to have his arrangements disturbed by a pair of flyaways like these. But he was still the finished actor, for the guard's benefit, and pretended, in words, to be overwhelmed with anxiety:

"How glad I am to see you, my young friends. I could not imagine what had become of you, and I had been seeking you high and low when I met the Burgomaster Haupt coming from his club, and he told me about the trouble at the docks. I was shocked, indeed, and it has been proved all a mistake."

When he got the boys outside, though, he concluded a different line of talk with:

"I'll have to tie bells around your necks when next you wander in strange pastures. You are likely to get into a neck-twisting fix with such pranks as these."

Neither Billy nor Henri made speeches for the defense. They meekly accepted this chiding, all the time rejoicing that they were again breathing free air. It was a mile ahead of six-by-eight stone walls.

"I'm through here," briefly announced Herr Roque at breakfast, "and after a call at Bremen I am going to restore this pair of lambs to the aviation lieutenant at Hamburg. There you can always be found when I want you."

"That means, Herr Roque, I suppose, that we will get cards for some more vacation trips?"

"It means, young man, that if you ask no questions you will receive no false information."

Billy was subdued for once.

At Bremen they found the hotels deserted, but the theaters and cafés full.

It was among these cafés that the boys sharpened their wits by close observation of Herr Roque, who was always looking for something when he appeared to be looking for nothing but an easy way of life.

They found occasion to use keen wit before that first evening in Bremen was over. It was a startling test.

As they basked in the benevolence of Herr Roque, facing him at a well-spread table in one of the brilliantly lighted cafés, Billy saw a familiar face reflected in a mirror hanging on the wall back of the chair occupied by their host—the smiling face of the secretary the boys had met in the office of the great man in Calais, who speeded them on their way to Paris.

The mirror also reflected the garb of a sailor,

merchant marine, and the man was at a table directly back of where the aviators were seated.

Billy felt in a flash that it would be like signing a friend's death warrant to make the least show of recognition.

Fearful that Henri might forget himself and draw the attention of Herr Roque, if suddenly confronted with the mirrored face, Billy used a knowledge of telegraphy, in which his companion was expert, by softly finger-tapping on the polished table surface between them the word "caution."

Henri was puzzled at the operation, but with the warning gave no sign by change of expression.

Herr Roque was toying with a fork, and seemed to be thinking at a distance. The boys, for the time being, were forgotten pawns.

Billy tapped "mirror."

Henri fixed a glance there.

Three pairs of eyes met in the shining glass.

The smile left the face reflected from behind.

The "sailor" knew and was known. His right hand was lifted carelessly to his lips, and a finger lingered there for a scant second.

The understanding was complete.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

THE boys were just aching in spirit for even a word with the supposed sailor, safely out of range of the lynx-eyed Roque, but the latter, after the experience in Kiel, stuck closer than a burr to his charges.

The face had passed from the mirror, and the owner of the smiling countenance sauntered through the street door of the café, mingling with many of his kind, smoking and chatting on the sidewalk.

"How will we make it?" tapped Billy on the table.

"Do not know," was Henri's answering tap.

Roque had paid the waiter for the dinner service, and was placidly puffing a long, black cigar.

"We might take a stroll," suggested Billy.

"Something like you did at Kiel?"

The secret agent seemed to have amused himself with this sly dig, but it was lost upon his young companions, who were working their wits to invent a getaway.

"How would you like to go to the theater?"

"Bully idea!" This was Billy's vote.

"Fine!" echoed Henri.

As the three passed out of the café, the boys brushed against the very man with whom they were eager to speak.

Billy was inspired at the moment to distinctly address Herr Roque regarding their return journey to the air camp:

"What time to-morrow do we leave for Hamburg, sir?"

Roque gave Billy a look of stern rebuke.

Billy was not worried about the answer he did not get in words. He saw a certain bystander uncover a fine set of teeth, and that was enough.

The play at the theater was a war drama, which was not at all like the real thing, but Billy was so delighted with the success of his stratagem at the café door that he was inclined to applaud at both the right and the wrong time.

Henri held his praise for his chum, when the two retired for the night.

"It looks like a case of 'diamond cut diamond' to me," he observed, "for you can wager that they would never send a fool over here to buck against the like of Roque."

"I bet they wouldn't," was Billy's sleepy opinion.

The next evening the boys were back in the air camp at Hamburg.

"You have your hands full, lieutenant," remarked Roque, with a wink and a nod at our Aviator Boys.

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There is no telling what he might have said had he known what Billy had put over on him the night before.

"Well," said the lieutenant, "though it appears that Roque has the first call on you, I'm going to keep you busy between times, and as there is nobody around now to scuttle your air mounts you can fly to your hearts' content."

They flew the air as they willed, in monoplanes and biplanes, singly or doubly, and, as usual, at the same time these boys managed to fly together into some of the ticklish affairs of earth.

It was on a Sunday morning that a jolly party of sailors came over from the harbor to the air camp, and, as they were all supposed to be "true blue," or, rather, "true gray," they were permitted to poke their noses into the hangars without restraint.

Billy and Henri, as the chief aviators present, were counted in as part of the exhibit, and delegated to represent the lieutenant, who claimed this one day for late slumber.

One of the sailors, while he and his comrades were watching the aërial maneuvers of a Zeppelin, had picked standing room as near to our Aviator Boys as he could conveniently get. So enthusiastic was this man over the majestic flight of the big airship that he grasped the hand of the near-

est member of the flying profession, which proved to be Henri.

There was something more than the mere pressure of the shake, however, for Henri's fingers closed over a wad of paper.

The sailor kept on cheering, but he did not keep on standing in the same spot.

The paper wad lay in an itching palm, for the holder was itching to open it.

He knew the man who had "delivered the mail!"

Billy also had something of an acquaintance with the bubbling sailor.

When the boys jointly read the faint tracing of the tissue message they could not comprehend all that it was intended to convey. That understanding was to come later.

Then, too, Roque must be in the reckoning.

Here we shall have to leave them, flying toward Kiel harbor, but their further adventures in their chosen profession will be found in the second book of this series under the title of "OUR YOUNG AËROPLANE SCOUTS IN GERMANY; or, Winning the Iron Cross."

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